2017

Soldiers of God: S#fism, Islamist Activism, and the Tradition of Comanding Right and Forbidding Wrong

John Samuel Houston
“SOLDIERS OF GOD”: ŞÛFISM, ISLAMIST ACTIVISM, AND THE TRADITION OF
“COMANDING RIGHT AND FORBIDDING WRONG”

By

SAM HOUSTON

A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of Religion
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2017

Copyright © 2017
Sam Houston
All Rights Reserved
Sam Houston defended this dissertation on March 20, 2017. The members of the supervisory committee were:

John Kelsay  
Professor Directing Dissertation

Jeffrey Ayala Milligan  
University Representative

Helen Boyle  
Committee Member

Sumner B. Twiss  
Committee Member

Adam Gaiser  
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members, and certifies that the dissertation has been approved in accordance with university requirements.
To Shannon, who from the very beginning of this journey has been my steadfast companion
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I firmly believe that a life well lived is determined largely by those whose company you keep. As such, I have been extremely fortunate over these last six years to surround myself with a truly capable and caring contingent of mentors, colleagues, friends, and family. The Department of Religion at Florida State University has been a warm, stimulating, and supportive environment, and it has taught me that despite the challenges one may find working in academia today, intellectual community and friendship are indeed possible. I am grateful to have had such accomplished mentors along the way such as Sumner B. Twiss, one of the voices most responsible for shaping recent comparative religious ethics. My ustadh Adam Gaiser not only guided me along the path of the academic study of Islam and imparted to me the importance of the material and particular in Islamic history (a needed counter-balance to my penchant for theological and philosophical abstractions), but he also generously bought me staggering amounts of Mexican food which we shared while conversing about such topics as Ummayad era numismatics, military history, and fantasy literature. I came to Florida State primarily to work with John Kelsay, for more than any other he provided a scholarly model which I hoped to emulate. With my background in Reformed theology and pragmatist thought and my aspirations to study Muslim ethics in comparative perspective, I could think of no one better with whom to study. During my time under his guidance, he has been an exemplar for me not only as a scholar of religious ethics, but as a gentleman as well.

A formative part of my education at Florida State also included my stint as editorial assistant with the *Journal of Religious Ethics* under the tutelage of Aline Kalbian and Martin Kavka. They taught me much about the publishing world, the landscape of the academic study of religious ethics, and the work place health benefits of laughter. Just as vital as my mentors were my fellow graduate student colleagues who provided not only intellectual friendship but comradery of all kinds. They include Kirk Essary, Tommy Carrico, Jeffrey Gottlieb, Josh Lupo, Lauren Cosgrove, Ross Moret, Syeda Beena Butool, Thomas Greene, Charlie McCrary, and Aaron Ellis. I have also benefited from the examples and guidance of those who completed their doctoral programs ahead of me and took faculty positions throughout the academy. Betsy Barre, Shannon Dunn, James Broucek, Rosemary Kellison, and Nahed Artoul Zehr all considerately shared their advice and encouragement with me along the way. And I am grateful for the financial support I received in the form of various internal fellowships, grants, and awards including the 2011–2013 Lucius Moody Bristol Graduate Fellowship, the 2015–2016 Florida State University Dissertation Grant, and the 2016–2017 Florida State University Graduate Student Research and Creativity Award.

Beyond Florida State University, I want to thank those who facilitated my research and writing and exemplified for me what it means to be a part of a scholarly community. In many ways, my project’s genesis may be traced to the summer of 2013 when I studied Arabic in Rabat, Morocco on the US State Department sponsored Critical Language Scholarship. It was there that I came upon the life and work of ʿAbd al-Salām Yassine (d. 2012), a man who, in his Islamist opposition to the monarchy and embrace of Şūfism and non-violence, fascinated me in his nonconformity with standard accounts of Islamism. As I pursued my research further, I presented my findings in a number of conference venues such as the American Academy of Religion and.
the Society for the Study of Muslim Ethics. In these settings, I received vocal support and helpful feedback from Marcia Hermansen, Kecia Ali, Sohail Hashmi, Jamie Schillinger, Bob Tappan, and Martin Nguyen.

Finally, I express my sincere and utmost gratitude to my friends and family whose support throughout this project has meant everything to me. I am especially grateful to the community of friends I made at Faith Presbyterian Church, for they grounded me and provided thoughtful and refreshing perspectives on the world beyond those of academia. My mother, Jean Huddleston, siblings, Shelby Soleimani, Ann Pogue, and J.J. Houston, and their families have all been sources of immense love and joy, and my father who recently passed away, James Houston, indelibly shaped me in ways for which I will always be in his debt. And as my dedication indicates, my wife Shannon Houston has been my constant companion and best friend for the entirety of this journey. Through it all, she expressed unwavering support, displayed bountiful patience, and proffered wise counsel. It is with her that I share all of my success and achievement.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Notes on Transliteration and Translation ...................................................................................... vii

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ viii

Introduction ......................................................................................................................................1

1. Al-Ghazālī, Ethical Formation, and “Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong” in Classical Islam .........................................................................................................................20


3. “Salafī Ṣūfism” and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood; or Tarbīya, Virtue, and Activism in the Thought of Saʿīd Ḥawwa ........................................................................................................122

4. Ṣūfism and Islamist Activism in Morocco: ʿAbd al-Salām Yassine, Iḥsān, and the Socio-Political Dimensions of the Spiritual Journey ..............................................................................151

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................181

References ....................................................................................................................................189

Biographical Sketch .....................................................................................................................201
NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

In my transliteration of Arabic names and terminology, I have followed the system utilized by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. For the sake of clarity, my transliterations do not reflect the assimilation of the definite article by sun letters. I have included the definite article only in those instances where a transliteration includes a name, phrase/sentence, or an *idāfa* structure (as in *uṣūl al-dīn*). In terms of the premodern dates used herein, I have written according to the Islamic (*hijrī*) calendar, followed by the Gregorian date (Common Era). For example, 505/1111 refers to the five hundred and fifth lunar year after the Hijra (the early Muslim community’s emigration to the city now known as Medina) and 1111 CE. Qurʾānic passages are cited numerically such that Q. 3:110 refers to chapter (or sura) 3, verse (or āya) 110. My translation of the Qurʾān typically follows that of the Sahih International version. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Arabic are my own.
In this project, I contribute to ongoing debates regarding proper conceptions of “political Islam” or “Islamism” by bringing greater attention to the roles that Islamic mysticism, or Ṣūfism (taṣawwuf), has played in shaping theories and practices of virtue and character formation in Islamist movements. I do so by undertaking a genealogical study of the discourse concerning the practice of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” in classical Islamic thought as well as in that of modern Sunnī Islamism. Figures such as medieval scholarly giant al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), Ḥasan al-Bannā’ (d. 1949), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Saʿīd Ḥawwa (d. 1989), a leading thinker of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, and ʿAbd al-Salam Yassine (d. 2012), who established the Moroccan Justice and Spirituality Association, all appropriated the discourse of commanding and forbidding in differing ways and for differing reasons to put forward activist visions of Islam; however, they all stressed the need for spiritual and ethical formation (tarbīya) and relied on Ṣūfism to accomplish this. Attention to the ways in which this “Ghazalian” tradition of Islamist thought and practice adopted Ṣūfī organizational structures and models of ethical formation challenges conceptual frameworks which have described Islamist groups primarily as products of modernity or as political ideologies. Additionally, study of this Ṣūfī-centric Islamist tradition offers a contrast to scholarship which has focused almost exclusively on Islamism’s exoteric scripturalism and fixation on the law. Such insights are crucial when attempting to understand and engage Islamist actors for purposes ranging from scholarly enquiry to cross-cultural understanding to policy formulation.
INTRODUCTION

“The mystic does not wish to return from the repose of ‘unitarian experience,’ and even when he does return, as he must, his return does not mean much for mankind at large. The prophet’s return is creative. He returns to insert himself into the sweep of time with a view to control the forces of history, and thereby create a fresh world of ideals. For the mystic the repose of ‘unitary experience’ is something final; for the prophet it is the awakening, within him, of world-shaking psychological forces, calculated to completely transform the human world.”

– Muhammad Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam

In the Islamic tradition, those who have endeavored to launch initiatives of religious and socio-political reform (tajdīd) and renewal (iṣlāḥ) have drawn on an array of discourses and practices, often calling on their fellow believers to return to the fundamentals of the faith as encapsulated in the Qurʾān, the Sunna of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the examples of the earliest forbearers (salaf). As historians have indicated, this reformist impulse has long characterized Islamic history, from the ‘Abbasid revolution to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s (d. 505/1111) program of revival to ‘Uthmān dan Fodio’s (d. 1817) jihād against religio-political corruption in West Africa (Lapidus 1997; Voll 1983, 1994). As exemplars of personal and social piety, prominent figures and institutions of Islamic mysticism, or Şūfism (taṣawwuf), too led such movements. Often those Şūfis who advocated reformist programs upheld a paradigm wherein the law (sharīʿa) and Şūfism were considered complementary rather than contradictory, for while the former was required to deal with the public and exterior (ẓāhir), the latter was needed to address the personal and interior (bātin). Referring to this matrix as the “Sunni-Shariʿa—Sufi synthesis,” that is, “the integration of Islamic legal teaching and mysticism that constitutes the mainstream of Sunni Islam,” Ira Lapidus has commented on the ways it continued to inform movements of reform and revival up into the early modern and modern periods, stating that this took institutional form in numerous “‘conservative’ Sufi brotherhoods” (1997, 448).
Formed around the teachings of a pious and learned shaykh, these brotherhoods, or orders (tariqas), developed transnational networks which were then employed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to create movements aimed at societal reform and renewal; however, as was the case for the Sanūsiyya in Libya, the Khatmiyya in Sudan, and the Naqshbandiyya-Khālidīyya in Chechnya, this often entailed resistance to the encroaching colonial powers of Europe. These tariqa-based movements provided what were perhaps the most effective structures, networks, and bases for the organization of socio-political action during the period of colonial rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, they furnished models and practices of ethical formation (tarbiya) within their communities which were ideal in cultivating the character and virtues necessary to be effective members of the vanguard of societal reform and resistance.

As John Voll has stated, during this period, rather than the legal scholars (ʿulamāʾ), “[i]t was the major popular organizations of piety, the brotherhoods, that provided models of organization and leadership for the defense of society” (1992, 68). In many ways, these activist Šūfī orders served as the predecessors of modern Islamist movements by providing structures of organization and authority as well as models of ethical formation which a number of them adopted, the most notable example being the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn). Such orders served as the living embodiment of Iqbal’s conception of the “prophet” for whom the “unitarian experience” functioned as a catalyst, not to repose in quiet contemplation of God, but to enter “into the sweep of time with a view to control the forces of history, and thereby create a fresh world of ideals.”

It is on the relationship between Šūfism and modern Islamist movements that this study focuses. More specifically, I seek to contribute to ongoing debates regarding the shape and nature of “political Islam” or “Islamism” by bringing attention to the formative role that Islamic
mysticism, or Śūfism, has played in modern Sunnī Islamist thought and practice. Much
scholarship on Sunnī Islamism has focused on movements that consider Śūfism a later corruption
of the practices of the salaf, and as a result, more Śūfī-centric traditions of Islamist activism have
not received a great deal of scholarly treatment (Voll 1994; Weismann 2007a). Such reductionist
accounts fail to acknowledge the patterns of practical reasoning, models of ethical formation, and
even structures of authority that may be said to span both pre-modern understandings of piety,
virtue, and communal responsibility and modern Islamist traditions. In order to demonstrate the
veracity of this claim, I undertake a genealogical study of the discourse concerning the social
practice of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” (al-amr biʾl-maʿrūf waʾl-nahy ʿan al-
munkar) from the classical period in Islam up to its deployment in modern Sunnī Islamist
activism, with a focus on those Islamist figures who relied heavily on Śūfism. My study
endeavors to provide not only a better understanding of a modern Islamist tradition that sought to
synthesize elements of Islamic law (sharīʿa) and Śūfism into an activist program for establishing
an Islamic socio-political order, but also, more broadly, a sense of the ways in which conceptions
of Muslim rights and duties have both radically shifted and maintained certain continuities over
time.

Throughout the history of Islam, the discourse of “commanding right and forbidding
wrong” has functioned as a site of practical reasoning wherein Muslim rights and duties have
been elaborated and debated in order to ascertain what is owed to the members of their
communities as well as to those outside of them. On the basis of Qurʾānic injunctions such as Q.
3:110 which states, “You are the best community brought forth from humankind, commanding
right and forbidding wrong and believing in God,” as well as the prophetic example, scholars
associated with various legal schools came to understand and interpret this duty as incumbent on
Muslims to induce their fellow believers to live in accordance with the norms enshrined in Islamic etiquette (adāb) and law. Michael Cook identifies what he calls the “three modes” tradition as the most prominent in early understandings of the duty. This second/seventh century prophetic tradition designates (in ascending order of praiseworthiness) the “heart” (qalb), “tongue” (lisān), and “hand” (yad) as the three proper “modes” by which one should carry out the duty (2000, 45). Once the three modes conception gained wide acceptance, debates then ensued about the character of the duty and included such questions as who performed it, who constituted its target, and how it was to be carried out. For example, in contrast to the Ḥanafī legal school who typically apportioned the duty based on a tripartite division of labor (the “hand” for the rulers, the “tongue” for the scholars, and the “heart” for the rest of society), al-Ghazālī, a member of the Shāfiʿī legal school, argued that all legally competent (mukallaf) Muslims in possession of the capability to perform the duty (qādir) enjoyed a right to employ all three modes when performing it as long as they prudently followed a sequence of escalating actions.

Cook notes that in the modern era understandings and discussions of the duty increasingly moved from ones focused on parsing Muslim rights and responsibilities towards fellow members of their community to ones more preoccupied with creating organizations and mass movements to confront the threats posed by colonial governance, corrupt Muslim leaders, and the encroachment of Western norms and practices. He describes the discursive shifts in the following manner:

It is not surprising, then, that in the modern Islamic world forbidding wrong appears primarily as a praxis for the spreading of Islamic, not liberal, values. Conceived in this fashion, it is not in any flagrant discord with the old scholastic tradition; but we can nevertheless discern a significant shift of emphasis. The core of the old conception was a personal duty to right wrongs committed by fellow-believers as and when one encountered them; the core of the new conception is a systematic and organised propagation of Islamic values both within and outside the community. (2000, 515)

One finds this modern development reflected in the work of reformist scholars Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), specifically in their widely influential journal *Tafsīr al-Manār* which served not only as a platform for distributing ʿAbduh’s Qur’ānic commentary (*tafsīr*), but also as a forum to discuss the most pressing challenges of their day which included European (and in the case of Egypt, British) colonialism, Christian missions, secular nationalists, and unbelievers. It is in the journal’s commentary on Q. 3:104 which declares, “[a]nd let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful,” that we find what is perhaps the first discussion of the systematic and organized propagation of Islam. In the interpretation put forward, the missionary implications of the verse were stressed, in the two-fold sense of calling both non-Muslims as well as fellow believers to the path of Islam (*daʿwa*).

While ʿAbduh and Riḍā considered this an individual duty (*fard al-ʿayn*) which all should embrace, they also argued for a more restrictive understanding of the phrase “from you a nation” (*minkum ummatun*), stating that it referred to a group (*ṭāʿifa*) set apart for the task of *daʿwa* in order to effect societal change. This group was to be specially trained in the traditions of the “virtuous forbears” (*al-salaf al-sāliḥ*) as well as in the moral and modern social sciences. As a result of its intellectual and ethical formation, this ethico-spiritual elite would be equipped to perform *daʿwa* and “command right and forbid wrong” in societies increasingly corrupted by secular norms and political authoritarianism (Roest Crollius 1978, 274-79).

In order to capture the discursive innovations that marked modern conceptions of commanding and forbidding *as well as* the continuities those understandings held with pre-modern treatments of the duty, I discuss its expression in the thought of a range of classical Muslim scholars and modern Islamist intellectuals whose work was significantly shaped by
Ṣūfism. For this Ṣūfī-centric Islamist tradition, the life and work of scholarly giant and “Proof of Islam” (Ḥujjat al-Islām) al-Ghazālī loomed large, not only because he provided an account of the duty in his Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn) which superseded all others in terms of both its scope and populist nature, but also more broadly as a result of the ethical paradigm he put forward in the Revival which drew from both Islamic law (sharīʿa) and Ṣūfism in order to address the interior and exterior dimensions of personal and public piety for the purposes of effecting societal renewal.²

I refer to this tradition of Islamism as a “Ghazalian” one for, more than any single figure, al-Ghazālī epitomized a kind of “Salafi Ṣūfism” (al-taṣawwuf al-salafi) wherein commitments to the exoteric (ʿilm, i.e. tafsīr, hadīth criticism, law, etc.) and esoteric (taṣawwuf, i.e. Ṣūfism) religious sciences were considered complimentary elements of a reformist middle way which avoided the excesses of both legalism and mysticism.³ In this way, al-Ghazālī was emblematic of a constellation of more sober or practical forms of Ṣūfism which were crucial in supplying Islamist movements with discursive and embodied practices that furnished an imaginative vision of reform as well as resources for the interior ethical and spiritual formation (tarbīya) required for cultivating effective activists. Members of this “Ghazalian” Islamism tradition were in many ways successors to eighteenth and nineteenth century reformist and activist Ṣūfī orders, all of whom advocated a form of Ṣūfism compatible with sharīʿa and prophetic hadīth and sought religious and socio-political reform and renewal, often by activist means. And while al-Ghazālī

² As we will discover in the next chapter, al-Ghazālī relied not only on law (fiqh) and Ṣūfism in formulating his “Science of Praxis” (ʿilm al-muʿāmala), but, as a number of recent scholars have demonstrated, the philosophical (falsafa) tradition of Ibn Sina as well.

³ This term is drawn from the work of Syrian Muslim Brotherhood ideologue Saʿīd Ḥawwa who employed it to describe his own thought. For Ḥawwa, the terms “salaf” was meant to capture not just the first three generations of the Muslim community but its early formative figures, including the founding figures of the four classical schools of Sunnī law (fiqh). Thus, as Ḥawwa stated, “Ṣūfism supplemented fiqh and fiqh governed Ṣūfism for the end of the scholars (ʿulamāʾ) and Ṣūfism was one” (1979, 50).
and other prominent activist Şūfī figures wielded considerable influence in this tradition, luminaries of the Islamist pantheon such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), Abū al-Aʿlā Mawdūdī (d. 1979), founder of Pakistan’s Jamaʿat-e-Islāmī, and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), revolutionary thinker of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, were also considered authorities worthy of emulation, though in some cases, of critique as well. I take as representative of this “Ghazalian” tradition of modern Sunnī Islamist activism Ḥasan al-Bannāʾ (d. 1949), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Saʿīd Ḥawwa (d. 1989), leading thinker of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, and Ḥaḍrāt ʿAbd al-Salam Yassine (d. 2012), responsible for establishing the Moroccan Justice and Spiritual Benevolence Association (Jamāʿat al-ʿAdl wa al-Ihsān). Whether it was the Ḥaṣāfiyya for al-Bannāʾ, the Naqshbandiya-Khālidīyya for Ḥawwa, or the Qādirīyya-Boutchichiyya for Yassine, all three were indelibly shaped by their membership in Şūfī orders, and even when they left those orders to found activist movements, as was the case with al-Bannāʾ and Yassine, they continued to affirm all they acquired during their time as adepts. This resulted not only in an extensive reliance on models of organization and authority provided by Şūfī orders, something that could be said of a number of Islamist groups, but also in explicit and vocal claims that proper attention to Şūfī thought and practice was essential for the success of any activist movement. This was so because without such attention, 

---

4 As Itzchak Weismann (2007) points out in his article discussing prominent Middle Eastern and Indian Islamist figures who combined commitments to Salafism and Şūfism, others who might be considered as belonging to this “Ghazalian” Islamist tradition include Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood thinker Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1996), Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leader Ḥaḍrāt ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (d. 1997), and Jamaʿat-e-Islāmī member and prominent Indian revivalist Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Nadwī (d. 1999). In broader terms of modern Muslim activist leaders who on focused interior ethical and spiritual formation, Henri Lauzière also mentions South Asian poet, philosopher, and politician Muḥammad Iqbal (d. 1938) and Kurdish religious scholar and advocate of educational reform in Turkey, Saʿīd Nūrsī (d. 1960) (2005, 257).
organization members would not possess the requisite character and virtues for achieving the movement’s objectives.

What emerged was a Muslim activist tradition which combined a pre-modern concern with cultivating pious character and virtue with a modern interest in creating effective organizations and movements, all for the purpose of establishing an Islamic legal and socio-political order. Beyond evidencing a distinct desire to create organized movements, another defining characteristic of modern appropriations of the commanding and forbidding discourse was a propensity to conceptualize them as a vanguard (ṭalīʿah) leading the way in the transformation of society. In this view, the performance of the duty was conceived as a right which should be embraced by all; however, because of the impoverished state of personal and public piety in modern Muslim-majority societies, only a righteous few could be expected to bring “true Islam” to the slumbering masses. While this notion of a vanguard set apart to effect socio-political change resonated with Marxist-Leninist types of discourse prevalent throughout the twentieth century, it also accorded with the common Ṣūfī distinction between the elite (khawāṣṣ) and the masses (ʿawāmm) wherein Ṣūfīs alone possessed privileged access to God and reality. As we will discover, for those Islamists such as al-Bannā’, Ḥawwa, and Yassine whose Ṣūfī commitments led them to argue that ethical and spiritual formation (tarbīya) was essential to the success of their organizations, the distinction between the ethico-spiritual elite and the masses was an especially crucial one. This focus on tarbīya led to a concomitant emphasis on education as the surest means to effect socio-political change, though all considered varying degrees of revolutionary activity to be legitimate. What one finds consistently in their work, however, is a deeply held belief that such action could be contemplated only after organization members developed the proper character and virtues.
Expected Scholarly Contributions

Several insights emerge from an examination of the role played by Şūfism in Islamist interpretations and deployments of the “commanding right and forbidding wrong” discourse that contribute to a variety of scholarly conversations. First, attention to Şūfism helps us to understand the continuities which some strands of Islamism have with more historic forms of Islamic thought and practice. Prominent Islamist figures such as al-Bannāʾ, Ḥawwa, and Yassine set out to create communities of the righteous set apart for a special task in a manner that was influenced by the imaginative visions, models of ethical formation, and organizational structures of particular Şūfī orders. Such conceptual and organizational frameworks served not only to shape these groups’ religio-political agendas, but they also gave rise to structures of authority which echoed those found in Şūfīsm, most notably in the way Islamist leaders adopted the title of General Guide (murshid al-ʿām) typically used by Şūfī masters. This appropriation of Şūfī symbols and social practices played an important role in endowing Islamist leaders and groups with authority in societies where the traditional repositories of authority such as the religious scholars (ʿulamāʾ) no longer held sway.

This observation, coupled with the continuities found in Islamist understandings and uses of the commanding and forbidding discourse, challenges characterizations of Islamist groups primarily as products of modernity (Roy 1994), “political ideologies” (Ayoob 2008), concerned with “political order, not faith” (Tibi 2012), or as being engaged in an “invention of tradition” (Eickelman/Piscatori 1996). Much of the analysis responsible for such claims is predicated on the conceptual dichotomies of “politics” versus “religion” or “tradition” versus “modernity.”

---

5 The tradition/modernity conceptual binary fails to recognize the ways modernity is itself a tradition (or family of traditions) of epistemologies and practices which historically emerged from a post-
Such problematic analytical frameworks have negative consequences not only in their
descriptive inadequacies but also in their tendency to perpetuate perceptions of appeals to
religious tradition as manipulative or retrograde. For example, though they admirably attempt to
push back against pejorative conceptions of tradition as static and resistant to change, Dale F.
Eickelman and James Piscatorì characterize “Muslim politics” as a “process of symbolic
production” which is dependent on the “invention of tradition” whereby the Islamic tradition is
“consciously modified and manipulated under the guise of a return to a more legitimate earlier
practice” (1996, 28). Commenting on Eickelman and Piscatori, Hussein Ali Agrama writes that
such an approach fails to bring adequate attention to “how ways of reasoning and practice might
be brought together or systematized in various ways for the purpose of cultivating selves with
sensibilities and desires thought appropriate to living a virtuous Muslim life” (2012, 14). That is,
 focusing on a tradition as a repository of symbolic elements, the myriad constellations of which
are equally valid in legitimating contemporary practices, elides the diverse ways traditions and
the institutions and practices to which they give rise engender a range of patterns of reasoning
and ethical formations. Moreover, the multifaceted discourses of many Islamist groups get
reductively obscured in discussions which treat them in primarily political or symbolic terms,
and as a result, little attention is given to the telling differences between the discourses espoused

Enlightenment Europe. That is, Eickelman and Piscatorì refer to the ways in which tradition is invented in
“modern” and “traditional” societies, and as such, the epistemic backdrop continues to be that of
modernity taken as a totality. Hussein Ali Agrama states that this approach “does not really question the
notions of modernity and tradition as ‘artificial constructs’ in relation to Islamic claims or movements.
What it offers us instead is the idea that tradition today is an artificial construct of modernity and contrary
to the truth of change” (2012, 14).

Moreover, Agrama avers, “[i]t must be remembered that symbols acquire their effectiveness
through their insertion in arguments, and arguments, in order to convince, justify, or even oblige response
must satisfy certain conditions. They must, for example, address the proper themes, cite the right
authorities, and employ the correct argumentative forms—all of which have been historically constituted
along with and in relation to the practices and institutions that together make up the tradition in question”
(2012, 44).
by those groups which hold similar political objectives or engage in varying types of symbolic production.

Scholarly works in the fields of Muslim political thought and the anthropology of Islam have provided very different accounts of Islamist groups and movements which conceive of tradition in more fluid and capacious ways. Thus, for example, when they speak of “Islamism” as referring to “contemporary social movements that attempt to return to the scriptural foundations of the Muslim community,” Roxanne Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman also write that, “the relationship between Islamist and non-Islamist religio-political orientations past and present is marked as much by continuities, complex overlaps, and subtle differentiations as by radical breaks” (italics mine) (2009, 4-5). With its focus on Islamist thought as standing in a tradition of argumentation associated with renewal (tajdid) through appeals to the earliest Muslim community (salaf), Euben and Zaman’s methodological approach shares much in common with Talal Asad’s notion of “discursive tradition.” In his essay, “On the Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” Asad states that, “[i]f one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur’an and the Hadith. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition” (1986, 14). According to Asad, “discursive traditions” are best understood as coherent sets of arguments and practices which over time are employed for “the formation of moral selves, the manipulation of populations (or resistance to it), and the production of appropriate

---


8 For further discussion of the debates surrounding the definition of “Islamism,” see Shahata 2010.
knowledges” (7). As such, discursive traditions are created and recreated not only by the attempts of contemporary holders of a particular tradition to conceive of the past in light of present concerns but also by the manner in which relations of power and other forms of contestation come to determine which forms of that tradition are taken to be authoritative. Additionally, arguments and social practices which play constitutive roles in the debates over what or who is to be considered an authority also function as critical elements in the formation of moral selves.

Conceiving Islamism as one of many Islamic “discursive traditions” provides a far more capable explanatory paradigm than methodological approaches that focus primarily on the sociological dimensions, political objectives, and modern contours of Islamist movements. To be sure, attention to the material conditions and polyvalent motivations of Islamist actors is a necessary component of any analytical framework; however, considering these factors at the expense of the practical reasoning and social practices which constitute Islamist movements often leads to an overriding focus on their disjunction from premodern forms of Islamic thought and practice. While such descriptions drawing attention to the innovations that mark Islamist discourses are right insofar as they go, their emphases on discontinuity obscure more than they illuminate, a claim I argue is supported by attention to the roles played by tarbīya and the commanding and forbidding discourse in those Islamist movements shaped by Ṣūfism.

My study generates a further insight by attending to the manner in which “Ghazalian” Islamists al-Bannā’, Ḥawwa, and Yassine stressed the need for proper ethical formation before

---

9 While Muhammad Qasim Zaman looks to Alasdair MacIntyre’s notion of “tradition” “as an argument extended through time” in his discussion of Muslim discourses, he believes that Asad, with his “greater attentiveness to institutions as constitutive of tradition,” provides a necessary (though not contradictory) supplement (2002, 196, fn. 29).
taking part in social activism and civic engagement in the form of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” Often scholarship on Sunnī Islamist movements has focused on the exoteric scripturalism and fixation on law more readily found in Wahhabism, and thus has overlooked those elements of Islamism which are concerned with ethical and spiritual formation (tarbīya) (Lauziére 2005). Moreover, such scholarship has perpetuated a Salafī-Ṣūfī divide wherein commitments to Salafism and Ṣūfism are taken to be inherently at odds with one another (Weismann 2001a). My study subverts these perspectives by bringing attention to the place of tarbīya in Islamist thought, thus filling the gap of a relative paucity of studies on theories and practices of virtue and character formation undergirding modern Islamist movements.10 To be sure, one may find ethnographic analyses of certain practices performed within these movements such as listening to cassette tape sermons (Hirschkind 2006), engaging in daʿwa (Mahmood 2005), and performing poetry (Miller 2015); however, little attention has been paid to those moral anthropologies and theories of ethical formation which animate and provide coherence to practices considered preparatory for public engagement and activism. Not surprisingly, those figures and movements especially shaped by Ṣūfism felt that attention to character development was crucial for an effective activist program and consequently devoted substantial attention to this area. In examining the roles played by “technologies of the self” such as companionship

---

10 In one of the few studies of tarbīya in modern Islamist thought, Meir Hatina highlights its importance for Islamist movements, stating “[t]he gradualist approach of the [Muslim] Brotherhood … dictated co-existence with the state. However, eschewing the resort to force did not mean easing the struggle over society’s morality. This struggle, depicted as a religious duty that ‘could not be ignored or compromised’, aimed at reinstating the cohesiveness of the nation and heightening its self-dignity, which would also deter foreign aggression against it. Education (tarbīya) was a major vehicle to achieve these aims. The tone, inspiration and pedagogic emphases in tarbīya were forged by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt from the 1930s onwards and were quickly adopted by similar movements in the Arab world” (2006, 182). For more on the role of tarbīya in Ṣūfism (specifically, the Tijānī order), see Seesemann 2011, 71-78 and Seesemann 2015, 279-98; and for a discussion of tarbīya in terms of general paradigms of Islamic education, see Halstead 2004.
(ṣuhba) and meditative remembrance (dhikr) in the journey towards spiritual benevolence (ihsān) so prominent in their brand of “Salafī Ṣūfism,” one gains insight into how Islamism devotes attention to ethical and spiritual formation. One also ascertains a more accurate understanding of Islamism’s variegated nature.

Chapter Overview

I begin in chapter one with a survey of the discourse concerning the practice of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” across the four predominant legal schools (Ḥanafī, Malīkī, Shāfiʿī, and Ḥanbalī) in classical Sunnī Islam, with a focus on the duty’s treatment by al-Ghazālī as well as its role in his ethical thought and theory of character and virtue formation. As noted above, after the development of the “three modes” tradition in which the duty was to be performed by either the use of force (hand), exhortation or admonition (tongue), or internal repudiation (heart), debates emerged about who precisely was responsible for carrying out the duty, to whom it was to be directed, and what its performance required. Depending on their legal affiliation, jurists distributed the labor in a range of ways, with some giving any Muslim who met minimal qualifications the right to command or forbid using any mode appropriate to the occasion (Malikīs, Shāfiʿīs, and Ḥanbalīs) while others were more restrictive, reserving the use of the “hand” for the political authorities and the “tongue” for the scholars (Ḥanafīs).

While treatments of the duty in the early classical period displayed varying degrees of comprehensiveness and sophistication in terms of the procedures which were to be followed in its execution, none compared to that given by al-Ghazālī which, as Cook has observed, superseded all other accounts by “an order of magnitude” (2000, 427). In many ways, this stemmed from al-Ghazālī’s socio-political milieu which was characterized by internecine
conflict resulting in the near total collapse of the Saljūq-ʿAbbāsid order, of which he was a prominent member as holder of a prestigious chair at the Nizāmiyya Madrasa in Baghdad. This instilled in al-Ghazālī a growing (but not total) disillusionment with the politics of his day and set him on the path of his reviver project which culminated in the Revival. As can be detected in the Revival’s focus on the “Science of Praxis” (ʿilm al-muʿāmala) which was informed by a synthesis of law, Ṣūfism, and philosophy, this project of reform was primarily concerned, not with the transformation of political leaders and institutions, but rather with the cultivation of communal and individual piety. As I argue, the duty to “command right and forbid wrong” played a pivotal role in this ethical paradigm as a ritual and social practice necessary for the cultivation of the virtues required for flourishing in this life as well as in the next. Later movements of reform and renewal would look to al-Ghazālī’s work as a major resource, not only because of his more populist account of commanding and forbidding, but also as a result of his theory of ethical formation which provided a model they could emulate in cultivating the virtues of effective activists.

Chapter two takes us into the modern period and the arrival of European forms of colonial domination throughout Islamdom. A range of secular, nationalist, and religious movements were founded in order to respond to the political, economic, and cultural threats posed by colonial administrations and the authoritarian rulers and politicians viewed as their agents. A number of Muslim reformist leaders, such as ʿAbduh and Riḍā, looked to the discourse of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” as a resource to provide an Islamic conception of a vanguard-led activist movement which would educate the populace in the ways of Islam and therefore reverse the cultural alienation plaguing Muslim societies as a result of encroaching European cultural and secular norms. The most influential successor to these reform efforts was
Hasan al-Banna, founder of the Society of Muslim Brothers (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin). In establishing the Society, al-Banna founded a new type of organization which he described as a Salafi message, a Sunnī way, a Ṣūfī reality, a political movement, an athletic group, a cultural-educational union, an economic enterprise, and a social idea (1965, 248). A teacher by training himself, al-Banna believed that it was through the proper education that Egyptian Muslims as well as those in the wider umma would develop the consciousness and character necessary to reestablish Muslim prominence in the face of colonial hegemony.

Beyond notions of a vanguard, we will find that al-Banna deployed the vocabulary of commanding and forbidding for nationalist purposes as well, declaring that Egypt’s destiny lay, not in being a dominant military power or a center of cultural production, but in commanding and forbidding among the nations of the world. For al-Banna, the most crucial element in this reformist and activist endeavor resided in attention to ethical and spiritual formation (tarbiya). Relying on Ṣūfī vocabularies and devotional practices he had acquired during his years in the Ḥaṣafiyya order, al-Banna developed a rigorous program for Brotherhood members which was meant to cultivate virtues such as truthfulness (ṣidq), sincerity (ikhlāṣ), and patience (ṣabr) which were considered integral to achieving the Brotherhood’s objectives. Though al-Banna’s successors in the Egyptian Brotherhood agreed with his emphasis on cultivating the character necessary for effective activists, they did not share his embrace of sober or practical Ṣūfī traditions as a resource for doing so, and as a result, this branch of the organization developed increasingly hostile attitudes towards all expressions of Ṣūfism.

However, as we find in chapter three, this was not the case with the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, a point most compellingly made when examining the work of Brotherhood thinker and Naqshbandi Ṣūfī Sa’īd Hawwa. Interestingly, rather than developing antithetical
relationships with the religious scholarly establishment which included both jurists (ʿulamāʾ) and Ṣūfis, as was the case with the Egyptian Brotherhood, the Syrian Brothers included a number of them in their ranks. In fact, one of the founders of the Ḥamāh chapter of the Syrian Muslim Brothers and the one who initiated Ḥawwa into the society was Muḥammad al-Hāmid, himself a shaykh in the Naqshbandī Ṣūfī order (Weismann 1997, 133). Ḥawwa soon became a prominent Islamist intellectual when he was tasked with formulating Brotherhood doctrine as the organization sought to find its way in the 1960s and 1970s under the authoritarian rule of the secular and socialist Baʿath party and Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad (d. 2000).

When considering the roles played by the discourse of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” in Ḥawwa’s thought, one striking quality is the degree to which his understanding and use of it were closely tied to more classical accounts. This is especially evident in the fact that his treatment of the duty is taken verbatim from that found in al-Ghazālī’s Revival. Compared to al-Bannāʾ and, as we shall discover, Yassine, Ḥawwa did not rely as much on the commanding and forbidding discourse to formulate an Islamic conception of a vanguard; however, he did refer to a select group (ṭāʾifa) of the ethico-spiritual elite set apart as “soldiers of God” (jund Allah) to effect societal change. Though Ḥawwa believed a time would come when revolutionary action would be required to overthrow the corrupt and oppressive regime of al-Asad, he cautioned patience and emphasized the importance of planning and preparation, the most important facet of which was tarbiya. Displaying an ethical psychology more sophisticated than either al-Bannāʾ or Yassine, Ḥawwa’s conception of character and virtue formation was informed by a science of ethics (ʿilm al-ikhlāq) which relied on both exoteric (taʿlīm) and esoteric (tarbīya) forms of education. In this paradigm both law (fiqh) and Ṣūfī devotional practice complemented each other in providing both exterior and interior forms of self-cultivation in order that one could
ultimately acquire God-consciousness (*taqwa*) and spiritual beneficence (*iḥsān*). Social practices such as the giving of advice (*naṣīha*) and commanding and forbidding played a vital role in this process such that personal and public virtues were viewed as mutually constitutive.

In the fourth and final chapter on Moroccan Islamist, ʿAbd al-Salām Yassine, we find that the quest for spiritual beneficence (*iḥsān*) also plays a vital role. Yassine, the founder of the Justice and Spiritual Benevolence Association (JSA) (*Jamāʿat al-ʿAdl wa al-Iḥsān*), was an active member of the Qādiriyya-Boutchichiyyya Şūfī order before entering a life of public activism, most famously with his 1974 open letter, “Islam or the Deluge” (*al-Islām aw al-tawfān*), which called on King Hassan II to abandon his blind emulation of Western cultural, political, and economic practices. Despite experiencing various forms of government imprisonment in the years that followed, Yassine was able to found an organization and movement which eventually became one of the most effective groups in Morocco opposing the monarchy in a quest for a more democratic and Islamic government.

In Yassine, we find a use of the commanding and forbidding discourse which, like al-Bannāʾ, focused on the notion of a vanguard (*ṭalīʿah*) to effect socio-political change. More than either al-Bannāʾ or Ḥawwa, Yassine’s understanding and employment of the vocabulary was tenuously related to classical accounts, though he too explored some of the same questions which historically marked the discourse such as whether the duty was best understood as an individual duty (*farḍ ʿayn*) or a collective one (*farḍ kifāya*). What most characterized Yassine’s understanding of commanding and forbidding was his reliance on Şūfī thought and practice as vital resources for *tarbīya* which he affirmed was crucial for the success of any Islamic activist movement. Yassine believed this to such a degree that even as he praised Mawdūdī and Quṭb, he also criticized their anti-Şūfī rhetoric and lack of attention to such practices as companionship.
(ṣuhba) and meditative remembrance (dhikr). For Yassine, the ultimate exemplars were al-Ghazālī and al-Bannāʾ because both were able to harness the insights of a “Salafī Ṣūfi” in order to create virtuous activists, a task which was essential for any movement which sought to bring about long lasting socio-political change. However, as we will discover, while Yassine primarily embraced education and non-violent forms of activism in this endeavor, he also entertained scenarios in which the use of force in popular uprisings to bring about regime change might be legitimate.
CHAPTER 1

AL-GHAZĀLĪ, ETHICAL FORMATION, AND “COMMANDING RIGHT AND FORBIDDING WRONG” IN CLASSICAL ISLAM

They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency, and vie with one another in good works. These are the righteous.
— Qurʾān 3:114

As Michael Cook indicates in his comprehensive study of the duty to “command right and forbid wrong,” while the notion possesses a lineage reaching back to the formative period of the Muslim community, it has continued to guide this community in word and deed into the modern and contemporary periods. Figures from Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) to Jalāl al-Dīn al-ʿAmrī (b. 1937), scholar and member of the Jamāʿat-i Islāmī in India, and ʿAlī ibn Ḥājj (b. 1956), activist preacher and leader in Algeria’s Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), have all looked to this vocabulary as they put forward activist visions for the transformation of society (Cook 2000, 507–08). And like al-Bannāʾ, ʿ Ħawwa, and Yassine, who will be discussed in subsequent chapters, either their general approaches to “commanding right and forbidding wrong” or their specific accounts of its performance were heavily indebted to the scholarly giant and “Proof of Islam” (Ḥujjat al-Islām), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). Though reflection on the nature and perimeters of this duty within each of the Sunnī and Shīʿite classical legal schools launched a thousand treatises, it was al-Ghazālī’s which, in the end, proved the most influential and authoritative. For this reason, some modern and contemporary treatments of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” even go so far as to take their accounts nearly verbatim from him.
In this chapter, I discuss the contours of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” in classical Islam with a focus on the account of this duty and its place within the life and wider thought of al-Ghazālī. I do so because attention to the vocabulary and patterns of reasoning that characterized debates over the performance of this duty during this period enables one to better grasp the ways in which discussions of the duty in modern Islamist movements both maintain continuity with as well as depart from these more classical traditions. Al-Ghazālī serves as the focal point of this chapter, not only because his account of the duty is widely considered the most prominent, but also because his synthesis of the exoteric religious sciences (ʿilm) and the esoteric mystical traditions of Ṣūfism (taṣawwuf) came to serve as a model for later Islamist movements which were substantially shaped by Ṣūfī thought and practice. Much of what attracted reformists such as al-Bannāʿ, Ḥawwa, and Yassine to al-Ghazālī was his ability to put forward a more “sharīʿa-minded” Ṣūfism within a paradigm of revival (iḥyāʾ) and renewal (tajdīd). In doing so, al-Ghazālī provided conceptual tools and social practices from within the Islamic tradition not only for a socially engaged vision of religious reform, but also for the interior formation and spiritual guidance (tarbīya) required for cultivating effective activists.¹

The text which formed the centerpiece of al-Ghazālī’s program of reform was his seminal work, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn), and it is in this work that we

---

¹ I take the term “sharīʿa-minded” Ṣūfism from Marshall Hodgson who, in describing it, states, “Long before Ghazālī, Ṣūfīs had been at pains to insist on the full and even rigouristic observance of the Sharīʿah rules by mystics. In the eleventh century, the Ashʿarī scholar al-Qushayri (d. 1074) was notable for analyzing mystical states consistently with Ashʿarī kalâm and hence in such a way as to reassure the Sharīʿah-minded. This sort of argument the ʿulamāʾ scholars proved willing to accept, or at least to wink at, so soon as it became clear that the whole Sharīʿah-minded structure as such was being left intact and accorded the respect in the only sphere, that of outward social acknowledgment, where the Sharīʿah-minded principles (ultimately concerned with social order) inescapably required it … [so that consequently] the Ṣūfīs dealt with the inward side (bāṭin) of the same faith and truth of which the Sharīʿah-minded scholars were concerned with the outward side (ẓāhir).…In all respects, the inward paralleled the outward, complementing it, not contradicting it” (1974, 218-19).
find his most comprehensive account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.”

With its focus on the “Science of the Path to the Hereafter” (ʿilm ʿtarīq al-ākhira), the Revival represented al-Ghazālī’s attempt to construct an integrated paradigm of devotional life and the religious sciences aimed at fostering individual piety in a broad audience. For this reason, al-Ghazālī indicates in the introductory exhortation (khutba) that the primary subject matter of the Revival is to be the “Science of Praxis” (ʿilm al-muʿāmala) which involves instruction in exterior (ẓāhir) matters of ritual and daily customs as well as in interior (bāṭin) states related to vice and virtue (1937–38, 1:5). This science involves the synthesis of law, Ṣūfism, and philosophy into a conceptual framework which Ebrahim Moosa describes as “a dialogic between virtue (faḍīla) and law (fiqh) that create[s] an ethics” (2005, 212).

As will become clear, this theological ethic was far from simply being a form of “orthodox Ṣūfism” even though many have taken it and the Revival to be such. Recent scholarship provides a more complex account of the role of philosophy (falsafa) in al-Ghazālī’s thought such that, far from rejecting the philosophical tradition as he has often been portrayed as doing, al-Ghazālī was grounded in it, with Ibn Sīnā’s (known also by his Latin name, Avicenna) (d. 428/1037) approach in particular constituting an important influence. Moreover, revisionist

---

2 One may also find accounts of this duty in two other works of al-Ghazālī’s, his abridged Persian version of the Revival entitled The Alchemy of Happiness (Kīmiyā-yi saʿādat) as well as his Forty Fundamentals of Religion (al-Arbaʿīn fī usūl al-dīn) which summarizes the Revival for an Arabic audience. His more condensed discussion of the duty in each of these works relies heavily on that found in the Revival.

3 Of the legions of editions of the Revival that are available, I use the Lajnat Nashr al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya edition which is widely considered among the most authoritative. Its system of pagination, however, includes two differing conventions, one which provides continuous pagination and the other which gives volume-based pagination. Some volumes have both conventions while others include only one. In my citations, I will indicate the continuous pagination, and where possible I will also parenthetically include the volume-specific pagination.

studies have sought to treat al-Ghazālī not only as a scholar but also as an historical actor whose intellectual corpus was shaped by the socio-political matrix of the Saljūq-ʿAbbāsid order of which he was a prominent member.⁵ As many know from his autobiography, The Deliverer from Error (al-Munqīdth min al-ḍalāl), al-Ghazālī experienced a spiritual crisis in 488/1095, after which he set out on a two year journey of self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment.⁶ During this period, he is believed to have authored the Revival, which sought to address and reform the corruption of the religious scholars of his day. It was on the basis of this work that al-Ghazālī later claimed the mantle of “Renewer” (mujaddid) of the century.

What has been discussed more seldomly is the degree to which his authorship of the Revival stemmed from his disillusionment with the religious and political leadership of his day. While al-Ghazālī’s chair at the prestigious Niẓāmiyya Madrasa in Baghdad placed him in contact with the most prominent figures of his day, including the powerful Saljūq vizier, Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), the Saljūq sultan Malikshāh (d. 485/1092), and the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Muqtadī (d. 487/1094), he soon was witness to severe political upheaval and social instability following the demise of all three men who died or were assassinated in rapid succession. This experience played a pivotal role in shaping al-Ghazālī’s project of reform as one primarily concerned, not with the transformation of political leaders and institutions, but rather with the cultivation of

⁵ Though recent scholarship has brought to light al-Ghazālī’s embeddedness in the social, political, and religious institutions of his day, earlier scholars too pointed to these realities. For example, see Watt 1963, Laoust 1970, and Goldziher 1981. While these figures were aware of al-Ghazālī’s involvement with the Saljūq establishment, they relied almost exclusively on the account provided by al-Ghazālī in his autobiography, The Deliverer from Error. Other sources revealing a level of political involvement on al-Ghazālī’s part beyond what is recorded in the Deliverer have since emerged. For more on these sources, see Griffel 2009, 19–23.

⁶ Most accounts of al-Ghazālī’s life portray this development as a rupture in his life and thought, and while the evidence supports the claim that some crisis did occur, characterizations of it (by al-Ghazālī himself no less) as effecting a radical break are exaggerated. As Frank Griffel writes, “[a]lthough the weight of certain motifs in al-Ghazālī’s writings changes after 488/1095, none of his theological or philosophical positions transform from what they were before” (2009, 43).
communal and individual piety. This placement of the individual and community at the center of the Revival in many ways explains the comprehensive nature of al-Ghazālī’s account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” As will become clear, the performance of this duty, along with others related vertically to the worship of God and horizontally to social interactions with others, all coalesced to form an ethics intended to ensure the attainment of felicity in the hereafter (al-saʿāda al-ukhariyya). Considered in this context, “commanding right and forbidding wrong” can be understood as a social practice necessary for the cultivation of the virtues required for flourishing in this life as well as in the next.

However, before examining al-Ghazālī’s account of this duty any further, I provide a brief survey of its Qur’ānic and Sunna-based origins as well as a discussion of the forms it took as it developed within the classical Sunnī legal schools. Differences in scholarly debates over the duty to “command right and forbid wrong” stemmed from the positions taken by jurists (ʿulamāʾ) on questions regarding who precisely was responsible for carrying out the duty, to whom it was to be directed, and what its performance entailed. Often, the vocabulary framing these debates was informed by what Cook calls the “three modes” tradition which identified the “heart” (qalb), “tongue” (lisān), and “hand” (yad) as the three proper “modes” by which one should fulfill the obligation. Depending on a number of factors both intrinsic and extrinsic to their legal schools, scholars apportioned this labor in differing ways, some reserving the execution of the duty by “tongue” for the scholars and by “hand” for the political authorities or those, such as the muhtasib, invested with the authority to carry out the duty on their behalf, and others arguing that these modes extended to all qualified believers.

---

7 For Shīʿī approaches to “commanding right and forbidding wrong,” see Cook 2000, 227–51 (for Zaydīs) and 252–304 (for Īmāmīs).
As we will find, al-Ghazālī, a member of the Shāfiʿī legal school, held what might be termed a more populist position in regards to the above questions. As long as one was a legally competent Muslim and in possession of the capability to perform the duty, one had the right, and depending on the situation, the obligation, to carry it out in any one of the three modes which was most appropriate. As a result of this position which made a number of al-Ghazālī’s contemporaries in other legal schools nervous, the account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” he gave became quite popular, not only among modern and contemporary Islamist movements, but for revivalists of all stripes. This was especially the case for those activists and movements shaped by al-Ghazālī’s synthesis of religious knowledge (ʿilm) and Ṣūfism, or what elsewhere I have called “Salafī Ṣūfism.” Not only did al-Ghazālī provide them with a more activist-based account of the duty to “command right and forbid wrong,” his theory of ethical formation which held the law and Ṣūfī thought and practice as two indispensable sides of the same coin provided a model they could emulate in cultivating the virtues of effective activists.

“Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong” in Classical Islamic Thought: A Survey

The earliest accounts of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” in the Islamic tradition stemmed from both a number of Qurʾānic injunctions as well as prophetic Sunna. Among the more well-known passages in the Qurʾān discussing the duty include Q. 3:110a which states, “You are the best community brought forth from humankind, commanding right and forbidding wrong (taʿmurūna biʾl-maʿrūf wa-tanhawna ʿan al-munkar) and believing in God,” and Q. 3:104 which declares, “[a]nd let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong (wa-yaʾmurūna biʾl-maʿrūf
wa-yanhawna ʿani ʾl-munkar), and those will be the successful.”  

From these and other Qurʾānic verses referencing the duty, a number of issues related to exegesis (tafsīr) arose.

First, the terms “right” (maʿrūf) and “wrong” (munkar) are rather amorphously used throughout the Qurʾān. In those passages which reference maʿrūf (for example, Q. 2:231, 2:178, 4:5, 4:8, 9:67, 31:15) and munkar (for example, Q. 5:79, 26:90, 22:41, 22:72, 29:45), they are not used in any technical or legal sense. As Toshihiko Izutsu has written, these terms were adopted from the moral vocabulary of pre-Islamic tribal societies and integrated into a new religious schema. Maʿrūf, which literally means “known,” denoted that which was familiar in a customary sense, and therefore, socially approved while munkar indicated its opposite, that is, unknown and alien (1966, 213). However, both of these concepts were invested with new meaning in the Qurʾān, and while it is impossible to understand them in any univocal sense, Izutsu has suggested that maʿrūf might be best translated as behavior conducted “in the right way” with the source of rightness lying, not in social convention, but in the will of God (214).  

And correspondingly, munkar denotes that form of behavior which deviates from this standard. This view places substantial emphasis on revelation (sharʿ) as the primary source for moral knowledge; however, other tafsīr gloss maʿrūf and munkar as a kind of moral knowledge acquired by reason (ʿaql). Among such perspectives are included Ḥanafī exegete al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981) along with Shīʿī commentators al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) and al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153);

---

9 In his discussion of “commanding right and forbidding wrong,” Roest Crollius cites al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310/923) commentary on Q. 3:110 which includes a discussion of the terms maʿrūf and munkar. Reflecting a later understanding of these terms, al-Ṭabarī wrote that, “The original meaning of maʿrūf is: all that which, when done, is acknowledged as good … and commendable, and is not considered as shameful among those who believe in God. The obedience to God is called something maʿrūf, because those who believe recognize it and do not reject acting thus. The original sense of munkar is: what God rejects, and [therefore people] have come to consider doing it as shameful. Thus, disobedience towards God is called something munkar, because they who believe in God reject acting thus” (1978, 259–60).
however, these were relatively rare (Cook 2000, 25). More often, definitions of these two concepts made reference to both reason and revelation. For example, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), followed by his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), grounded his understanding of each in a natural more sense (fitra) which he believed to be in harmony with those truths acquired by revelation. Of note is that these conceptions of “right” and “wrong” include epistemic as well as performative aspects in terms of the way in which one carries out a familial or social duty. 

A second exegetical issue arose when attempting to capture the precise meaning of the phrase found in Q. 3:104, “And let there be from you a community …” (wa-l-takun minkum ummatun) or, alternatively, “And let there be one community of you …” Debates over this passage arose among scholars attempting to decipher precisely who was to carry out the duty. Was the verse exhorting the believers to be one nation or community that “commanded right and forbade wrong” or did it identify a select group from among the believers which was to do so? That is, did the duty apply to all believers or just a subset of them? The difficulty lay in identifying the group mentioned in the phrase “from you a community,” or again alternatively, “one community of you” (minkum ummatun). Much of one’s view on this depended on how one interpreted the min (“from” or “of”) in minkum. Some scholars such as early philologist Zajjāj (d. 311/923) adopted the first view and construed the verse as a summons to the community to be

---

10 For more on Ibn Taymiyya’s conception of natural moral sense in the context of his discussions of the relationship between reason and revelation, see Abrahamov 1992; Cook 2000, 153; and Anjum 2012, 198–206.

11 Roest Crollius puts it this way: “In general, maʿrūf denotes the acknowledged way of behaving towards others, especially in matters of family and property… Al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf describes an attitude and a way of acting that are characteristic of Islam both as a religion and as a social reality. It is expressive of a commitment to equity, both in a religious and an ethical sense. No wonder, therefore, that ‘it will become the slogan of all religious reformers in Islam’” (1978, 264).

12 The full verse reads, “And let there be from you a community inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful.”
united in its performance of the duty which applied to all (Cook 2000, 17). Those who advocated this interpretation also adduced Q. 3:110 in support of their claim which more explicitly identifies the community of believers as the “best community” for “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” This, however, was a minority view. Most other classical exegetes considered the phrase “from you a community” to refer to a select group, and consequently the duty was considered a collective (fard `alā 'l-kifāya) rather than individual one (fard 'ayn). Thus, as long as there existed a certain number of qualified Muslims fulfilling the obligation, the rest of the community was freed from responsibility. Typically, a number of requirements were identified which the individual performing the duty had to possess. For example, al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) believed knowledge to be the most important quality in “commanding right and forbidding” for in order to execute it in an equitable manner, familiarity with legal norms and ritual practices was required (Roest Crollius 1978, 266–71). For some, this led to the claim that the duty was the prerogative of the scholarly class; however, most maintained that the obligation was open to and incumbent upon all, as long as they were duly competent.

Of note too in the exegetical material is the transition in the discussion of to whom the duty was to be directed from what might be called a “missionary impulse” to one that was more internecine in nature. For example, in his commentary on Q. 3:104, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) states that to “command right” is to “order the people to follow Muḥammad and his religion” while to “forbid wrong” is to “forbid disbelief in God and the denial of Muḥammad…” (cited from Roest

---

13 Others who held this view included al-Māturīdī (d. c. 333/944), al-Wāḥīdī (d. 468/1076), and al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) (Cook 2000, 18).
14 Those who argued that the duty should be restricted to the scholarly class included Ibn ʿAtiyya (d. 541/1146) and al-Thaʾālibī (d. 873/1468) (Cook 2000, 19).
Crollius 1978, 265). Moreover, the duty was sometimes construed analogically to the “just war” (jihād) tradition so that for some, such as al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya, performing jihād was viewed as “commanding right and forbidding wrong” by other means (Roest Crollius 1978, 272–73; and Cook 2000, 490–91). However, while one may find elements in commentaries on Q. 3:104 and 3:110 which direct the execution of the duty towards non-Muslims, the majority of Sunnī exegetes considered it a social practice meant to hold fellow believers accountable to the norms established by the Qurʾān, Sunna, and Islamic law (sharīʿa) (Roest Crollius 1978, 273; Madelung 1981, 993; and Cook 2000, 27). There were still others who combined these perspectives by conceiving the execution of the duty as one form of jihād broadly understood. Perhaps the most well-known figure to do so was ʿAlī (d. 40/661) who declared that “commanding right and forbidding wrong” were the finest means by which to wage jihād (38).

In addition to the Qurʾān, the prophetic Sunna, or hadīth, served as a vital source for early understandings of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” Without question, the hadīth most

---

15 Of note regarding the commentary on those verses related to “commanding right and forbidding wrong” is Cook’s observation that it is rather amorphous in nature, especially when compared to the extensive accounts of it that one finds in works of theology (kalām) and law (fiqh). He writes, “[t]he general conclusion from this account of the activity of the exegetes is that their detailed understanding of the verses and their wider conception of the duty do not have very much to do with each other….The overall effect is to insert the duty into the daily life of the community in a far more concrete way than the Koran, read as naked scripture, would seem to require” (2000, 31).

16 In my use of “broadly understood,” I refer to the wide range of registers in which jihād has been construed in the Islamic tradition. Literally meaning, “to struggle,” this concept has been used in a wide variety of genres, legal and otherwise, to capture the internal as well as the external ways in which Muslims strive to live according to the norms of their tradition. We will find this to be the case with Ḥawwa and Yassine who each discuss “commanding right and forbidding wrong” under the broad rubric of jihād understood in multiple modes. While Ḥawwa specifically cites ʿAlī’s notion of the duty mentioned above, Yassine speaks of the lesser and greater jihād which he takes from the prophetic hadīth which states, “The Prophet returned from one of his battles, and thereupon told us, ‘You have arrived with an excellent arrival, you have come from the Lesser Jihad to the Greater Jihad - the striving of a servant (of God) against his desires.’” A substantial number of Muslim scholars have deemed this particular hadīth to have a weak (daʿīf) chain back to Muḥammad because it does not appear in any of the six recognized hadīth collections; however, of note is that al-Ghazālī approvingly cited a variation of it in the Revival in his discussion of Ṣūfī insights into training one’s soul to become virtuous (1937–38, 2:1456–57 (112–13)).
extensively cited in discussions of the duty presents a three-fold progression of action which one is to take in the correction of a wrong being perpetrated. It states: “‘Whoever sees a wrong (munkar),’ says the Prophet, ‘and is able to put it right with his hand (an yughayyirahu bi-yadihi), let him do so; if he cannot, then with his tongue (bi-lisānihi); if he cannot, then with his heart (bi-qalbihi), which is the bare minimum of faith.’”\(^{17}\) This hadith gave rise to what Cook refers to as the “three modes” tradition which identifies (in ascending order of praiseworthiness) the “heart” (qalb), “tongue” (lisān), and “hand” (yad) as the three proper “modes” by which one should carry out the duty (32). With its minimal yet comprehensive indication of the types of action to be taken in the righting of wrongs as well as a scale of value to be used in evaluating those actions, this prophetic tradition provided a conceptual framework that was later appropriated by scholars in their discussions of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.”

Additionally, a range of other prophetic hadith informed later conceptions of this duty. Some of these encourage the performance of the duty while others highlight reasons for hesitation or even avoidance in carrying it out. In one, the prophet Muḥammad exhorts his followers to correct any wrongs they witness or risk collective punishment in the form of God ignoring the community’s prayers or even sending the Persians (ʿAjam) against them.\(^{18}\) Another quotes Muḥammad as saying that the finest form of jihād is speaking out in the presence of an unjust ruler, and, in some versions, being killed for it.\(^{19}\) Others, however, draw attention to the

\(^{17}\) This particular hadith is found the collections of Muslim (d. 261/875), Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), and Nawawī (d. 676/1277). Some include a narrative wherein the Umayyad caliph Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam (d. 65/685) is rebuked by a man for beginning the commemoration of a feast day with a sermon rather than a prayer. One of those present named Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī (d. 74/693) then intervened to declare that this man had done his duty. Following this story, the prophetic hadith is then presented which lays out the three-fold manner by which one should confront a wrong in their midst (Cook 2000, 33).

\(^{18}\) Quoted in al-Tirmidhī as well as Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), among others (Cook 2000, 36–37).

\(^{19}\) Versions without reference to death following the act of confronting an unjust ruler include those by Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, and Ibn Ḥanbal. Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) cites a version that speaks of
negative, and even soul-damning, consequences which might accompany commanding right if not justly performed. There is a prophetic hadīth which warns the believer against forbidding wrong if it is likely to entail an ordeal which cannot be properly handled whereas another speaks of a particular punishment in hell reserved for those hypocrites who command right while acting wrongfully themselves.\(^{20}\) And one includes an anecdote in which a man visits the prophet Muḥammad to request permission to engage in correcting wrongs himself, only to be told that this activity was rather to be carried out by the rulers.\(^ {21}\) Of note is Cook’s observation that the provenance of those prophetic hadīth which either encouraged or discouraged commanding right often was a function of political geography. That is, most of those which discouraged the duty and played down its importance originated in Syria, the seat of Umayyad rule in the first/seventh-second/eight centuries, while those which construed the duty in positive and even imperative terms stemmed from Kūfa, the center of opposition to the Umayyads. He thus concludes that, “[t]his … suggests that the material is often implicitly political even when not explicitly so” (2000, 45).

These Qurʾānic passages and prophetic traditions provided the vocabulary and conceptual building blocks for later Sunnī legal schools (madhāhab) as they sought to further elaborate the nature of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” through the analysis and debate of such questions as who was to perform it, what it consisted of, and who was to be the target. Often differences among the legal schools arose as a result of their relationships to political authorities

\[^{20}\text{Included in collections by al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Ḥanbal, and al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) (42).}\]

\[^{21}\text{This tradition was transmitted by the Companion ʿAbdallāh Ibn ʿAbbās (d. c. 68/687) and may be found in al-Farrāʾ’s text on “commanding right and forbidding wrong” (d. 458/1066) (43).}\]
as well as their theological sympathies. The Ḥanafīs, from their prominence under dynasties from the Persian Sāmānids (263–395/875–1005) to the Turkish Ottomans (1299–1923), in large part tended toward accommodationist accounts of the duty while the Malīkīs of North Africa (al-Maghrib) embraced more activist ones. In theological terms, the Muʿtazilites, who exerted an early influence in some Sunnī legal schools before going on to significantly shape Zaydī and Imamī Shīʿism, placed great emphasis on the duty, even to the extent that they included it as one of their five animating principles (al-uṣūl al-khamsa) while it was far less central to those sympathetic to Ashʿarite theology who typically claimed membership in the Malīkī or Shāfīʿite legal schools. More often than not, Sunnī treatments of the duty to “command right and forbid wrong” occurred in doctrinal works on the fundamentals of faith (uṣūl al-dīn) rather than in manuals of law. Shāfīʿite Ashʿarite al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) bemoaned this fact, arguing that it should be more properly treated as a legal topic (Madelung 1981, 993). Not only was the duty seldomly dealt with in legal treatises, but it received little attention outside of religious scholarly circles. That is, it was rarely taken up in those traditions outside of the religious sciences, including ethics in the philosophical tradition (falsāfa), practical counsels for rulers, or Şūfī handbooks (Cook 2000, 495).

---

22 For more on the (a)political affiliations of these schools, see Hallaq 2005 and 2009, and for more on their institutional relationships to the theological trends of their day, see Mākdisī 1981.

23 Some Sunnī Muʿtazilites who wrote extensively on the duty included Shāfīʿite ʿAbd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī (d. 415/1025) and one of his students, Abū ʾl-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044), a member of the Ḥanafīs. Some features which came to characterize their doctrines of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” included systemization, abstraction, and activism. While Muʿtazilite writings on this subject shaped the genre in Sunnī circles in substantial ways, the theological school was largely superseded among Sunnīs either by Ashʿarism or the traditionalism of the Ḥanbalīs (202–04, 218, and 224–27). Many of its elements were eventually taken up by Zaydī and Imamī Shīʿites, hence the lack of any sustained treatment of the Muʿtazilites in this essay which focuses on “commanding right and forbidding wrong” in Sunnī scholarly circles. For more on the theological school, see Martin et. al. 1997.
Nevertheless, members of each of the four classical Sunnī legal schools viewed the duty to “command right and forbid wrong” within Muslim communities as a vital social practice and so endeavored to develop a doctrine of the duty as well as a protocol to be followed in its execution. The Hanafīs, who were the oldest legal school and predominantly concentrated first in Central and South Asia and later in Anatolia, devoted relatively little attention to the duty, not even addressing it in legal or theological texts. In various sources, Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), the school’s eponymous founder, discussed the duty as one of five doctrinal points that served as a sort of creed (ʿaqīdah), writing that it is a divinely ordained imperative and might even require the removing of an unjust ruler, though in practice he discouraged this by stating that, more often than not, such extreme action caused more harm than good. Later sources attributed the tripartite division of labor to him with the “tongue” reserved for the scholars (ʿulamāʾ) and the “hand” for the political authorities (umarāʾ) (308–09). We begin to detect more quietest tones in the later commentator al-Māturīdī (d. c. 333/944), whose theological schema would go on to dominate the school. In one commentary, he cited Abū Ḥanīfa’s caution against rebellion due to its negative consequences as reason for the abandonment of the duty altogether. This conclusion was further supported by al-Māturīdī’s declaration that because it was no longer carried out for pious but rather vainglorious ends, the duty to “command right and forbid wrong” had lapsed. Though other Hanafīs elected to diverge from this particularly extreme reading, the general approach to

\[24\] Cook raises the question of whether al-Māturīdī meant to dismiss the entire duty or simply those elements of it that could be construed as supporting rebellious action. While it is not entirely clear, al-Māturīdī’s general thrust is undoubtedly one intended to discourage activist readings of the duty (2000, 311).

\[25\] One example is Abū ʿl-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983) who presented an account of the duty which stated that in order to qualify as a candidate for its performance, one should be of the virtuous (ahl al-ṣalāḥ) and possess the requisite ability (qudra) to carry it out. Moreover, the duty should be performed in private (fī ʿl-sirr) when possible and in public (fī ʿl-ʿalāniya) when not. While obviously departing from al-Māturīdī in the legitimate role he accords the duty, he does follow the standard Hanafī pattern in
the duty adopted by subsequent members of the school, especially during its reign as the
Ottoman state’s official legal doctrine, is best described as accommodationist (333).

While later Mālikīs, especially in Andalusia and North Africa, were known for their more
activist, and in some ways, populist, notions of the duty, the views of their school’s founder,
Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), proved to be more ambivalent in nature. Some of the school’s later
adherents worried about his contact with the ʿAbbāsid rulers of his day such as al-Manṣūr (r.
136-58/754-75) and Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–93/786–809) which gave the impression that he had
become too accustomed to consorting with the ruling class, something of which scholars, as
keepers of the law, were to be wary. One source speaks of the habit of one of Mālik’s peers, Ibn
Abī Dhiʿb (d. 159/775), to speak out when in the presence of rulers while Mālik said nothing
(382). Still, Mālik very much approved of the duty to “command right and forbid wrong,” both
in the face of publicly committed moral indiscretions as well as in the presence of rulers (359–
60).

Later sources point to the existence of what are likely systematic Mālikī discussions of
the duty; however, the only sources which are currently available include Qur’ānic commentaries
as well as commentaries on the sayings of Mālik along with occasional works of Ashʿarite
doctrine. One such work by al-Bājī (d. 474/1081) references a number of traditional sayings on
the topic by Mālik before going on to discuss the duty using both the “three modes” framework
as well as a set of three conditions which must be met prior to performing it. The conditions
include, first, the ability of the one carrying out the obligation to know right from wrong, and
second, the near certain likelihood that the actions committed will not bring about a result worse

his interpretation of the “three modes” tradition as indicating that the rulers are to perform the duty by
“hand,” the scholars by “tongue,” and the rest of society (ʿāmma) by “heart” (313).
than the wrong being corrected. If one of these conditions is not satisfied, then they should not proceed by tongue but rather only condemn the transgression in their heart. However, the third condition stipulates that if the first two are met and the believer knows or strongly suspects that the wrongdoer will comply, the duty then becomes obligatory (363). Ibn Rushd (d. 520/1126) later took up this same conceptual approach to “commanding right and forbidding wrong,” but he uniquely developed his own account in two ways. First, he states that the duty was individual (fard 'alā 'l-a'yān) rather than collective in nature, provided the conditions were met, which was an unusual view as most Sunnī scholars have considered it a collective duty. And second, citing Q. 5:105 which calls for believers to focus on themselves rather than the wrongdoings of others, Ibn Rushd refers to his day as a time when the duty is irrelevant as the community had become so corrupt that performing it was an act of futility (363–64).26

While discussion of the duty often occurred within scholarly circles, there were instances in the second/eighth to the sixth/twelfth centuries in both Andalusia and North Africa when the vocabulary of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” was taken up by adherents of the Mālikī school to challenge and even create new religio-political orders. Andalusian rebel Ibn al-Qiṭṭ (d. 288/901) cited it when he launched a rebellion, and more famously, founder of the Almohad dynasty (524–668/1130–1269) Moroccan Amazigh Ibn Tūmart (d. 524/1130), a student of Mālikī scholar al-Ṭūṭūshī (d. 520/1126) who wrote a recension of al-Ghazālī’s *Revival*, fashioned his rise to power in terms of religious reform, partly by consistently engaging

---

26 The full verse reads, “O you who have believed, upon you is [responsibility for] yourselves. Those who have gone astray will not harm you when you have been guided. To Allah you return all together; then He will inform you of what you used to do” (*Sahih International*).
in the practice of forbidding wrong (389, 458–59). While there were activist elements in a number of the accounts of the duty in Mālikī circles, there is little that seems to support these more extreme interpretations and applications. One hypothesis cited by Cook which has been put forward by Mercedes García-Arenal suggests that al-Ghazālī’s gloss on “commanding right and forbidding wrong” which, as we will see, placed a great deal of power in the hands of ordinary believers, came to wield a great deal of influence in the Muslim West, including the Mālikī school (390–91). In fact, the Mālikīs never developed a distinctive position on the duty, even going so far as to borrow heavily from Shāfiʿites other than al-Ghazālī including al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), and al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) (376).

Like many later Mālikīs and unlike their school’s eponymous founder, Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) avoided rulers with their trappings of prestige and wealth while his later followers cooperated with and, in some instances, even embraced the state. A renowned scholar of hadīth who enjoyed a quiet and somewhat humble existence in ʿAbbāsid Baghdad, Ibn Ḥanbal sought neither cooperation nor confrontation with the rulers of his day. He is perhaps best known for his role in the “Inquisition” (Miḥna) wherein he opposed caliph al-Maʾmūn’s (d. 218/233) attempts to coerce scholars into admitting that the Qurʾān was a created rather than eternal form

---

27 Interestingly, there is an unconfirmed story which involves Ibn Tūmart meeting al-Ghazālī. For more on the possibility of this encounter and what it might have entailed, see Fletcher 1997. For more on Ibn Tūmart’s biography, see Hodgson 1974 and García-Arenal 2006, 157–92.

28 One example of a discussion of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” that stands out in its openness to violent confrontation is that of Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) who stated that recourse to arms in performing the duty might be necessary, especially when attempting to unseat an unjust ruler (390).

29 This way of understanding Ibn Ḥanbal’s relationship to the state stands in contrast to both Madelung who has argued that Ibn Ḥanbal strongly supported the political authorities and Ira Lapidus who has characterized the relationship as instead one of strident opposition. Rather, Cook considers Ibn Ḥanbal to have adopted a position more apolitical in nature in its avoidance of the state altogether, mainly due to his deeply held (and widely shared) suspicions of the corrupting effects of power. As Cook writes, “[h]e was ready to render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar’s; beyond that, what he asked most of all was to be left alone, and in that lies a key to his doctrine of forbidding wrong” (113). For those views mentioned above which differ with Cook, see Madelung 1988, 25 and Lapidus 1975, 383–84.
of divine speech (kalām). However, he did not seek to challenge the caliph; rather, it was the caliph who had him questioned and then imprisoned and tortured for his refusal to acquiesce. In the end, Ibn Ḥanbal and his traditionalist party emerged victorious, with the later caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 247/861) capitulating to popular opinion and releasing the righteous captive, even going so far as to favor Ibn Ḥanbal and his family with gifts.30

This skepticism towards the ʿAbbāsid authorities specifically and the state more generally colored much of Ibn Ḥanbal’s approach to the duty to “command right and forbid wrong” which was recorded in a series of sayings on the topic by Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (d. 311/923) (88–89). He avoided the state not only in terms of seeking its assistance in performing the duty (for the state could be harsh and capricious in its use of power), but also in invoking the tradition to rebuke rulers for their corrupt behavior. When his uncle urged him to take advantage of those times he was summoned to the caliphal court by al-Mutawakkil so as to forbid wrong, he refused (101). Ibn Ḥanbal’s conception of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” rather focused on correcting the improprieties of those fellow believers within one’s daily orbit. Thus, one might direct the performance of the duty towards neighbors who publicly drink liquor, play musical instruments, improperly perform ritual prayer (ṣalāt), or simply disrupt the peace with boorish behavior. However, privacy was to be respected, and so one was not to spy or barge in on those

30 The miḥna has often been portrayed as caliph al-Maʿmūn’s attempt to impose the Muʿtazilite thesis of the created Qurʾān on the scholars and populace at large, as if the crux of the issue lay in a theological dispute. What is missed in such analyses is the way in which this conflict stemmed from the growing power of the scholars, many of whom were sympathetic to Ibn Ḥanbal and his traditionalist peers. According to Patricia Crone, “[w]hat his choice of a single, highly controversial rationalist doctrine shows is that the miḥna was in the nature of a gauntlet flung at the Ḥadīth party” (2004, 131). Consequently, this event is best understood not simply as an attempt to support one theological school, i.e. the Muʿtazilites, at the expense of others or to impose a set of theological beliefs on the populace; rather, it was also an attempt to force on to a group of jurists a tenet of the rationalist theology favored by the courtly elite, and thus to acquiesce to the authority of the caliph in matters of faith. For a more conventional view of the miḥna, see Fakhry 1997, 19–20.
engaged in suspicious behavior, an occasional practice of the official censors (muḥtasiba) which Ibn Ḥanbal deplored (99). Additionally, fear for one’s safety and the likelihood that the offender would refuse to desist from the indiscretions in question served to exempt one from the obligation to command right or forbid wrong. In explaining the protocol to be followed when performing the duty, Ibn Ḥanbal followed the “three modes” tradition cataloging a range of situations in which either the “heart,” “tongue,” or “hand” would be the most appropriate means by which to right wrongs. Thus, if one was to encounter a believer imbibing liquor, reproving such activity by “heart” would be expected, but to exhort (waʿaẓa) or even shout (ṣāḥa) a warning would earn one praise. And if this failed, even more honor would be accrued by employing the “hand” to destroy the object containing the illicit substance. Beyond acting individually, some situations might require the organizing of helpers (aʿwan) to assist in confronting a wrongdoing (95–98).

While Ibn Ḥanbal’s account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” exhibited some activist and even populist aspects, these elements were limited to the local environment and did not entail opposition to the policies of the state. Of course, neither did it involve appeals to or even cooperation with the political authorities. However, among later Ḥanbalites in Baghdad and Damascus in the fifth/eleventh century, this began to change. Much of this in Baghdad had to do with the expansion and growing confidence of the Ḥanbalite school and, more importantly, its closer ties to the ʿAbbāsid caliphate which resulted from the presence of foreign rulers in the form of the Būyid (322–454/934–1062) and Saljūq (428–590/1037–1194) dynasties. The most dramatic consequence of this newfound relationship between the caliphate and the Ḥanbalites manifested itself in their subsequent employment in public office as judges (qāḍīs), a state of affairs Ibn Ḥanbal and many earlier Ḥanbalites would not have countenanced.
The Ḥanbalites of Damascus eventually developed closer ties to the Ayyūbid (570–658/1174–1260) and Mamlūk (658–922/1260–1516) states, mainly because they adopted pluralist policies which included the establishment of state judge positions for each of the four dominant Sunnī legal schools (147). While this did not replicate the symbiotic relationship which had existed between the Ḥanbalites of Baghdad and the ‘Abbāsid caliphate, it fostered a sense of cooperation with the state, especially following the Mongol sacking of Baghdad which effectively ended the caliphate as a major institution in the Sunnī world.

A member of the Ḥanbalite school in Damascus whose views on the state reflected this sense of cooperation and whose account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” proved to be influential for later scholars was Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). To be sure, Ibn Taymiyya was a thorn in the side of many Mamlūk authorities in both Damascus and Cairo, and he earned a reputation for being notoriously ornery, a trait that landed him in prison not a few times (Little 1975, 96–97). However, his clashes with the authorities belied, as Cook states, “a structural disposition to cooperate with the state, and it is cooperation rather than confrontation that is the keynote of his political thought” (2000, 150). Much of this stemmed from the socio-political context in which Ibn Taymiyya found himself which included external threats from encroaching Mongol forces and internal threats in the form of factionalism and infighting within the ranks of the Mamlūk leadership. Consequently, a concern for stability and unity came to characterize much of his thought, and he believed the state should play a substantial role in this process. As we will see, this emphasis on the responsibility of political authorities to ensure stability and the moral order manifested itself in the role Ibn Taymiyya gave the state in carrying out the duty.

---

31 For more on Ibn Taymiyya’s role in rousing opposition to the Mongols, see Al-Matroudi 2006, and for a better understanding of the instability which resulted from internecine Mamlūk conflict, see Hodgson 1974, 417–19.
We find Ibn Taymiyya’s account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” primarily in a short treatise he wrote on the subject. According to him, the duty was a crucial one because it encapsulates God’s revelation to the Muslim community and the wider world, and as such, it was an obligation for all believers, though some properly performing it relieved the rest of the community of its responsibility. For Ibn Taymiyya, this collective duty (‘alā ʾl-kifāya) held a strong connection to the “just war” (jihād) tradition which he claimed was the natural extension and completion of commanding and forbidding (152). It was to be carried out according to the “three modes” tradition with civility (rifq) and patience (ṣabr), and on condition that one possess the ability to discern right (maʿrūf) from wrong (munkar) and that the benefits (maṣlaḥa) resulting from the duty’s performance outweigh the adverse consequences (mafsada). The obligation to “command right and forbid wrong” hinged on the power (qudra) one had to effectively right the wrongdoing (153).

In Ibn Taymiyya’s formulation of the duty, Cook observes two qualities worthy of note. First, there is a utilitarian calculus at work in his assertion that a condition for carrying out the duty requires that the benefits supersede the drawbacks. Elsewhere in the same text, he refers to “the general rule” (al-qāʿida al-ʿāmma) which states that once both costs (mafāsid) and benefits (maṣāliḥ) have been identified, the course of action should be chosen according to that which is preponderant. And as Cook and others have noted, this pragmatism has been identified as one of his political thought’s most salient characteristics (154).  

---

32 In support of this claim, Cook cites the discussion in Laoust 1939, 245–50 of Ibn Taymiyya’s notion of maṣlaḥa. In a discussion of the utilitarian dimensions of Ibn Taymiyya’s political thought, Ovamir Anjum references the following quote from Ibn Taymiyya’s major work of political thought, al-Siyāsa al-sharʿiyya: “The obligation is to attain and complete what is good and remove or reduce harm; if there is a contradiction in this regard, then procuring the greater of two goods, while possibly losing the lesser one, or avoiding the greater of two harms, while possibly tolerating the lesser one, is the essence of the shar’” (2012, 240).
the primacy Ibn Taymiyya placed on “those in authority” (*ulūʾ l-amr*) as the ones who were first and foremost responsible for performing the duty.\(^{33}\) He not only spoke of the duty as an obligation for a range of societal leaders from the scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) to the elders (*mashāyikh*) to the state bureaucrats (*ahl al-dīwān*); he even went so far as to ground the purpose of the state itself in the imperative to “command right and forbid wrong.” Much of this stemmed from one of the conditions which Ibn Taymiyya stipulated for carrying out the duty: possessing the power (*qudra*) to execute it. As such, it was those in places of authority, and preeminently the state, who were most likely to meet this requirement (155).

Ovamir Anjum agrees that Ibn Taymiyya placed a great deal of importance on the governing rulers as the authorities most able to carry out the duty; however, he also argues that Ibn Taymiyya used the doctrine of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” to radically reimagine the role of the state in Muslim political thought. That is, by grounding the purpose of government in the injunction to command and forbid, he institutionalized in the form of the state that which had previously been a duty assigned to the entire Muslim community. In his treatise on the office of public morality (*hisba*), Ibn Taymiyya wrote:

> The sole objective of the entirety of the Islamic governmental offices (*al-wilāyāt al-islāmiyya*) is commanding right and forbidding wrong, be it in the ministry of defense, such as the deputyship of the Sultan, or smaller offices such as the ministry of police, ministry of justice, ministry of finance – which is the ministry of records – and the ministry of public morality (*hisba*).\(^{34}\)

In conceiving the entire edifice of government in this way, Ibn Taymiyya assigned a normative and Qur’ānic purpose to the state and effectively created a political ethics which had not existed before.

---

\(^{33}\) The phrase “those in authority” is taken from Q. 4:59 which states, “O you who have believed, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority (*ulūʾ l-amr*) among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best in result” (*Sahih International*). For more on how the notion of “those in authority” has been interpreted in Muslim political thought, see Afsaruddin 2006.

\(^{34}\) Anjum quoting Ibn Taymiyya (2012, 245).
in the Islamic intellectual tradition, and therein, claims Anjum, lies his most important
contribution to Muslim political thought (2012, 245, 268). Moreover, since the existence and
aims of the state were justified and institutionalized according to a duty which had also been
given to the community of believers, government was then viewed as representing that same
community and performing the duty on its behalf. In this arrangement, the state derives its
authority from its ability to “command right and forbid wrong” and is likewise held accountable
by the community according to its capacity to fulfill this function. Thus Anjum concludes, “[i]t is
not the Community that owes unqualified obedience and service to the Islamic state, but the state
that derives its raison d’être from its fulfillment of the Community’s mission” (269). And
because political legitimacy was based on the practice of commanding and forbidding, the
community rather than simply the caliphate now became the site of political authority, an
observation further supported by Ibn Taymiyya’s realistic appraisal of rulers and his moral
epistemology.35 As we will see, both this community-centered vision of the Islamic polity

35 In his Siyāsa, Ibn Taymiyya claimed that consultation (shūrā) was a necessity for rulers for
they were no essentially no different from their subjects and therefore required their guidance. Anjum
writes that for Ibn Taymiyya, “It is the Community, not the ruler, who has been protected from persisting
in error, and that protection is because of the mechanism of mutual advice, commanding, and forbidding.
But because the ruler has a greater share of power and responsibility, his responsibility to consult others is
greater” (247). This blurring of the boundaries between ruler and ruled was furthered by Ibn Taymiyya’s
conception of natural inclination (fiṭra) which he believed provided a psychological foundation for a
rationalist epistemology which enabled access to basic moral truths. Anjum states that for Ibn Taymiyya,
it functions as, “a divinely placed inclination in the human psyche toward all that is good, which provides
guidance to the intellect, which is a tool and could be used for good or evil” (223). This, however, did not
mean that the human mind could grasp the mysteries of prophecy unaided by revelation. Ibn Taymiyya
attempted to make room for both by arguing that one could never contradict the other, but in doing so, he
went further than many previous Sunnī thinkers, most notably the Ash’arites, in establishing a minimal
rationalist moral epistemology. Whereas he agreed with the Mu’tazilites that unaided moral reason could
know basic ethical truths, he also agreed with the Ash’arites that it was God who decided whether an act
constituted good or evil. This not only subverted an elitism found in Sunnī theological and legal thought,
“it was particularly suited for ethico-political as opposed to legal modes of reasoning, calculated to try to
revise the political life of the Community.” For more on fiṭra and its relationship to reason and revelation
(umma) and the way in which it is fostered by the duty of “command right and forbid wrong” resonates with aspects of al-Ghazālī’s own ethico-political vision, especially in how his account of the duty reflected an element of his thought which placed the locus of responsibility for the umma’s moral order on the community and its leaders rather than its rulers. As we now move on to the Shāfiʿites, the preponderance of our time will be spent examining the account al-Ghazālī provides of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” in the context of his life and thought. However, it is worth briefly discussing two pivotal figures in this legal school who predate him, al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) and al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085).

As we now move on to the Shāfiʿites, the preponderance of our time will be spent examining the account al-Ghazālī provides of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” in the context of his life and thought. However, it is worth briefly discussing two pivotal figures in this legal school who predate him, al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) and al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085).

As with the Ḥanafīs, Mālikīs, and Ḥanbalites, the Shāfiʿites did not treat the duty in their law books, a practice of which, as noted above, the Shāfiʿite Ashʿarite al-Juwaynī disapproved. Rather, the topic was typically addressed in scriptural commentaries (tafsīr) and doctrinal works on the “fundamentals of religion” (uṣūl al-dīn). One exception to this was al-Māwardī who discussed the duty in his Ordinances of Government (al-Aḥkām al-sulṭānīyya), one of the most influential works of Muslim political thought. Interestingly enough, he did not structure his approach in terms of the “three modes” tradition, and devoted a large portion of his time on the subject to the duties of the officially appointed censor (muḥtash) (344). While in other works al-

---

36 E.I.J. Rosenthal (1958, 52) and Ann K.S. Lambton (1981, 148–50) too share the observation that a community-centered concern animated Ibn Taymiyya’s theory of the caliphate and was responsible for his attempts to blur (if not deconstruct) the boundaries between the rulers and the ruled by placing the legitimacy for governing in the community rather than in the office of the caliph. However, their differences with Anjum lie in their claim that, for Ibn Taymiyya, the caliphate was not necessary. Anjum argues that this is a misreading, and that Ibn Taymiyya in fact wrote that it was an obligation; however, while the qualities that had typically been required of the caliph such as Qurayshī lineage were to be upheld if possible, the more substantive requirements of managing the community’s affairs according to the sharīʿa were essential. As Anjum writes, “[i]n the domain of politics, Ibn Taymiyya recognizes the need for an ethic of compromise and accepting the lesser of two evils” (2012, 265). For another view which corroborates Anjum’s argument that Ibn Taymiyya considered the caliphate an obligation, see Hassan 2010.

Māwardī stated that it is the obligation of anyone witnessing a wrong to confront it, even if that required the organizing of a group, in *Ordinances* he displays a different tone. His presentation of the nine differences between an individual and the official censor performing the duty downplays more activist notions of commanding and forbidding, even to the point where the censor alone rather than any individual is permitted to organize helpers. As Cook notes, it is no surprise to find such a perspective in a treatise written for the Būyid rulers (345).

As the second Shāfiʿite figure to be discussed who pre-dates al-Ghazālī, al-Juwaynī is of particular interest for he was al-Ghazālī’s most formative teacher. Like most Sunnī commentators, he stated that the duty was a collective one. While every believer was obligated to take action in response to those acts which can be understood in the basic moral terms of right or wrong, only those with the requisite education could command or forbid in matters which demanded scholarly judgment. Though not previously mentioned, a facet of scholarly discussions of the duty which al-Juwaynī too brought up entails the circumstances in which one may perform the duty against an adherent of a different legal school. The position endorsed by al-Juwaynī, and the majority of Sunnī scholars, stated that in areas in which legitimate differences may be said to exist between the legal schools, such as in the posture adopted for ritual prayer, one school should not attempt to impose its norms on others (345). In contrast to al-Māwardī, al-Juwaynī embraced a more activist notion of “commanding right and forbidding wrong,” approvingly citing those who confronted rulers and even stressing that taking action when words fail is permissible. Though he was clear that such action did not entail armed conflict which he generally reserved for the ruler, he did state that if a ruler consistently acted.

---

38 For more on al-Juwaynī’s political thought, see Lambton 1981, 104–07; and Crone 2004, 231–32, 238–39.
unjustly and ignored verbal warnings, then “the people of binding and loosing” (ahl al-hall waʾl-ʿaqd) were responsible for opposing him, even to the point of armed confrontation.

To be sure, many scholars deemed such a statement irresponsible and liable to foment civil strife (fiṭna); however, it should come as no surprise when one considers that al-Juwaynī suffered exile for a period of time as a result of an anti-Shāfiʿite and anti-Ashʿarite campaign waged by the Ḥanāfī Saljūq vizier, al-Kundurī (346; Hodgson 1974, 177). Al-Juwaynī’s pupil, al-Ghazālī, too experienced this sectarian atmosphere in Nishapur and Baghdad where Sunnī legal schools, ʿAbbāsid caliphs, Saljūq sultans, and Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs all competed for influence and supremacy. This environment, as dominated as it was by polemic and power grabs, led al-Ghazālī to embark on a project of social and religious renewal which culminated in his Revival. It is this work which contains al-Ghazālī’s account of the duty to “command right and forbid wrong,” an account which far superseded any others in its breadth and depth. As we will find, it was al-Ghazālī’s turn away from the rulers and towards the community and its leaders as a part of his project of revival that goes far in explaining the unprecedented attention which he gave to the duty.

Al-Ghazālī, the Revival, and the Virtues of “Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong”

As Cook observes, al-Ghazālī’s discussion of the duty to “command right and forbid wrong” overshadows most previous treatments by “an order of magnitude” (2000, 427). It constitutes the ninth book in the second quarter (rubʿ) of the Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn), that work for which al-Ghazālī is most known and the basis on which he
proclaimed himself to be the “Renewer” (mujaddid) of the century.⁴⁹ Within the overall architecture of the extensive work, the duty falls under the rubric of “daily customs” (ʿādāt), the three other rubrics being “ritual observance” (ʿibādāt), “destructive vices” (muhlikāt), and “saving virtues” (munjiyāt). These areas which collectively comprise the “Science of Praxis” (ʿilm al-muʿāmala) weave together ritual and legal obligations into a philosophical ethical framework that seeks to cultivate the exterior (ẓāhir) and interior (bāṭin) elements of Muslim devotional life.

In referring to the “Science of Praxis,” al-Ghazālī intended to acknowledge his debt to Ṣūfism; however, as recent studies have demonstrated, his treatment of this subject was thoroughly informed by the philosophical tradition (falsafa), most notably that of Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037).⁴⁰ This is especially apparent in his ethical psychology which follows in the traditions of Ibn Sīnā, Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), and al-Īṣfahānī (d. 452/1060) by drawing heavily on the Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines of the soul and its virtues (Sherif 1975, 24–25). He combined these insights with those found in Ṣūfism and the science of law (ʿilm al-fiqh) to form an ethics. This focus on the “Science of Praxis” throughout the Revival reflected al-Ghazālī’s central concern with ethical and spiritual formation (tarbīya). He claimed that through the spiritual insights and social practices found in Ṣūfism, one could better understand the purposes of the law and live according to its directives, all of which transformed the individual into a virtuous believer who could flourish in this life and the next. In this sense, “his ethics was … traditional jurisprudence mediated by mysticism” (Moosa 2005, 213).

---

⁴⁹ As Garden points out, though past figures had applied the honorific title of “renewer” to others they deemed worthy of the appellation, al-Ghazālī was the first to attain it by way of self-proclamation (2014, 129)!

⁴⁰ See footnote three above for a list of the most significant of these studies.
As Kenneth Garden’s study has demonstrated, much of why al-Ghazālī made ethical formation a central focus of the Revival had to do with the chaos and instability he experienced as the Saljūq-ʿAbbāsid order crumbled around him. This dramatic development led him to embark on a project of revival with the cultivation of individual and communal piety at its center (2014, 54). However, al-Ghazālī tells a different story in his autobiography, The Deliverer from Error (al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl). In this narrative, he deals with an early bout of radical skepticism, enjoys public acclaim as a celebrated scholar, and is stricken by a spiritual crisis which eventually leads him to embrace Sūfism and set out on a journey of self-discovery through Damascus, Jerusalem, Medina, and Mecca. During this period, al-Ghazālī tells us, he immersed himself in solitude and contemplation, after which he eventually returned to Nishapur to resume his teaching duties a changed man. Though this narrative of al-Ghazālī achieving spiritual enlightenment by embracing the life of a reclusive peripatetic has long been considered by Western scholars to be an accurate representation of his life, recent revisionist studies have brought attention to the ways in which al-Ghazālī remained a socially and politically engaged scholar throughout the entirety of his adult life.

41 In writing such an autobiography, al-Ghazālī followed a long literary tradition established by the Greek philosopher and physician Galen and carried on by the early Sūfī al-Muhāsibī, the philosopher-poet ʿUmar Khayyām, and the Ismāʾili Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Such autobiographies often served important didactic and apologetic purposes, and in al-Ghazālī’s case, his was meant as a defense of his orthodoxy and authority, both of which were questioned in light of certain cosmological claims made in the Revival. The controversy seems to have stemmed from an allegory he used to illuminate the relationship between God and the world which reflected the influence of Ibn Sīnā’s monistic cosmology. In the eyes of al-Ghazālī’s detractors, this parable threatened divine unity and freedom (Garden 2014, 95–98, 158–60). For an extended discussion of this parable, see Gianotti 2001, and for the Deliverer in translation, see al-Ghazālī 1980.

42 Earlier scholars were certainly aware of al-Ghazālī’s involvement with the members of the Saljūq-ʿAbbāsid establishment, most notably Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), and the degree to which that shaped his political thought; however, only since the mid twentieth century and the discovery of al-Ghazālī’s Persian letters have his activities following his 488/1095 departure from Baghdad become known. As the work of Griffel 2009 and others attest, he remained in contact with a number of political authorities, colleagues and students, and as Garden argues, much of al-Ghazālī’s correspondence involved
Most likely born in 448/1056–57 in Ṭūs in the region of Khurasan, al-Ghazālī and his brother, Aḥmad, were primarily raised by their mother as their father died early in their lives. It is reported that al-Ghazālī’s early education entailed his learning at the feet of two pivotal figures, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Rādhakānī, a teacher of jurisprudence whose family connections extended to the wider family of Niẓām al-Mulk, and Abū ʿAlī al-Fāramadhī (d. 477/1084), a Shāfiʿite Šūfī who had once been a pupil of the Šūfī master Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) (Ormsby 2008, 26). From there, he went on to study in Nishapur with the acclaimed Shāfiʿite Ashʿarite scholar al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085). As mentioned previously, al-Juwaynī had been forced to undergo a period of exile as a result of the persecution of the Shāfiʿites and Ashʿarites by the vizier, al-Kundurī, and Saljūq sultan, Toghril-Bey (r. 432–44/1040–63). Following the death of the Saljūq sultan, Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092) came to power as the vizier and reversed this policy, even going so far as to found a system of madrasas known as the Niẓāmiyya to support Shāfiʿite law and Ashʿarite theology. The main chair at the prestigious Niẓāmiyya madrasa in Nishapur was offered to al-Juwaynī, and it was thus at the zenith of his career that al-Ghazālī came to study with him. Of note is that al-Juwaynī was the first Muslim theologian to seriously study Ibn Sīnā’s thought, and as a result, his own works of Ashʿarite theology bore a marked Avicennan imprint (Griffel 2009, 29–30). In light of this, it is no surprise that al-Ghazālī’s thought would bear the same Avicennan traces.

the promotion of his project of revival and reform. For a review of the reception history in Western (and especially Protestant) scholarship of al-Ghazālī through the lens of the Deliverer, see Garden 2014, 3–5. For the reception history in both the Western academy and Muslim scholarship, see Moosa 2005, 16–19, 23–24.

43 Most biographical dates given for al-Ghazālī indicate that his birth year is 450/1058–59; however, Griffel argues that, based on letters he wrote towards the end of his life in which he refers to previous events of note, one can reasonably calculate that he was born between 446/1054 and 448/1057, with the most likely year being the latter (Griffel 2009, 24–25).
Following al-Juwaynī’s death in 478/1085, al-Ghazālī took a position in the vizier Niẓām al-Mulk’s court in Isfahan, a period about which little is known. Al-Ghazālī came to public attention and eminence as a scholar upon his appointment by Niẓām al-Mulk to the Niẓāmiyya madrasa in Baghdad in 484/1091 (Garden 2014, 20). This was a prolific time for him. In the Deliverer, he states that even in the midst of teaching three hundred students, he found time to conduct a comprehensive study of the philosophers (falāsifa) and author a refutation. While debates continue as to when exactly al-Ghazālī initiated this study which became his well-known Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahāfat al-falāsifa), there is no question that he published it during this period along with other works. Moreover, though the Incoherence has often been interpreted as an almost complete refutation of philosophy, it rather sought to expose the fallacies in arguments made by philosophers which claimed to rest entirely on deductive syllogisms, otherwise known as rational demonstration (burhān al-ʿaql). Though the philosophers claimed to establish such proofs as God’s unity or lack of embodiment through rational means alone, al-Ghazālī argued that their conclusions relied instead on truths handed down by both prophecy and their philosophical predecessors, thus making them just as guilty of imitation (taqlīd) as the theologians (mutakallimūn) they denigrated. Al-Ghazālī disagreed not

44 While Maurice Bouyges and George F. Hourani followed al-Ghazālī’s autobiography and dated the composition of the Incoherence to the period following his move to Baghdad, Griffel has argued that it resulted from work begun long before 484/1091. For more, see Bouyges 1959; Hourani 1984, 292–93; and Griffel 2009, 35.

45 Many have taken al-Ghazālī’s Intentions of the Philosophers (Maqāṣid al-falāsifa) to be a preparatory work for the Incoherence, all for the purposes of putting forward arguments to reject philosophy. However, Jules Janssens has argued that rather than being the preparatory study for the Incoherence, this work is in fact a student summary (taʿlīqa) of a philosophical treatise by Ibn Ṣinā entitled Dānishnāmah. In support of this claim, he points out that none of the twenty philosophical positions al-Ghazālī criticizes in the Incoherence are discussed in the Intentions (2001).
with every tenet held by the philosophers but rather the means by which they claimed to have proven them (39–40).46

During al-Ghazālī’s tenure in Baghdad, tensions began to emerge within the ranks of the Saljūq-ʿAbbāsid leadership which eventually erupted into outright conflict. This stemmed from fissures between the Saljūq sultan Malikshāh (r. 465–85/1073–92) and Niẓām al-Mulk as the maturing sultan increasingly asserted his autonomy over and against the vizier (Safi 2006, 64–67). Long in his position, Niẓām al-Mulk indeed held a great deal of power and was repeatedly successful in thwarting court administrators looking to take advantage of the growing distance between him and the sultan.47 Still, tensions remained. The delicate arrangement in which the ‘Abbāsid caliphate provided religious legitimacy for Saljūq political power was upended when Malikshāh, in a move intended to consolidate religious and political authority within his own regime, ordered al-Muqtadī (d. 487/1094) to vacate Baghdad so that it might become the Saljūq capital.48 On the way to Baghdad with the sultan’s court to see that this wish was carried out, Niẓām al-Mulk was fatally stabbed by a man posing as a Şūfī mendicant. Though standard accounts of the incident claim that the assassin was a member of the Niẓārī Ismāʿīlī led by

46 However in the Incoherence, al-Ghazālī does identify three positions traditionally held by the philosophers as forms of unbelief (kufr) and thus warranting the legal status of clandestine apostasy (zandaqa). They include: 1) that the world is eternal and thus had no creation in time; 2) that God’s knowledge applies only to classes of beings (universals) and not individuals (particulars); and 3) and that bodily resurrection is not real, meaning that the rewards and punishments of the afterlife are spiritual only (2000, 226).

47 From Niẓām al-Mulk’s high status and his creation of the pro-Shāfīʿīte and Ashʿarite Nizāmiyya madrasas, it has been inferred that he intended to wage sectarian warfare as his predecessor al-Kundūrī had done. A number of scholars, however, have argued that he in fact sought to promote policies of religious reconciliation to encourage social stability and order. Omid Safi argues that with the creation of his system of madrasas, Niẓām al-Mulk sought to bring about greater parity between the Ḥanafī legal school which had Saljūq support and the underdog Shāfīʿites. Moreover, Safi points to instances in which Niẓām al-Mulk discouraged fellow Shāfīʿites from engaging in partisan rancor (2006, 93–95). For further corroboration of this perspective, see Bulliet 1972, 74; Glassen 1981, 75–76.

48 For more on the tenuous and often fraught Saljūq-ʿAbbāsid relationship, see Safi 2006, 55–65.
Hasan-i Sabbāḥ (d. 518/1124) from his mountaintop fortress in nearby Alamūt, more recent assessments have argued that it was rather the work of Malikshāh. Upon arrival to Baghdad, Malikshāh decided to go hunting as he waited for the caliph to complete his move out of the city. Following a meal of wild game, he was stricken with a fever and died, an outcome many believed to be a result of foul play, perhaps as a result of caliphal machinations (80). Whatever the death’s provenance, caliph al-Muqtadī likely was likely grateful for the development; however, only a short time later, he too succumbed to death. Thus, in a period of roughly a year and a half, the most powerful members of the Saljūq-‘Abbāsid order were dead, and political instability and civil war soon became pervasive as various figures struggled for succession in both the sultanate and caliphate.

Due to his status as the leading scholar at the prestigious Niẓāmiyya madrasa in Baghdad and his previous connections with Niẓām al-Mulk, al-Ghazālī served as an emissary between the sultan and the caliph and witnessed these tumultuous events firsthand. In their wake, he put his scholarly efforts into supporting the Saljūq-‘Abbāsid order in a number of ways, perhaps most notably through his authorship of the The Scandals of the Esotericists and Virtues of the Mustazhirites (Faḍā‘iḥ al-bāṭiniyya wa faḍā‘il al-mustazhirīyya) at the behest of the new caliph al-Mustazhir (d. 512/1118). Written in the tradition of juridico-political (siyāsa sharʿīyya) treatises, Scandals of the Esotericists sought both to support the caliphate in light of the realities of the Saljūq regime’s hegemony as well as to repulse the ideological threat posed by the Ismāʿīlī Shiʿite Fāṭamids in Egypt and North Africa (r. 296–56/909–1171), also polemically referred to as

---

49 Based on accounts by some Muslim historians, Safi argues that it was Malikshāh rather than a Nizārī Ismāʿīli assassin who was responsible for Niẓām al-Mulk’s death. Much of this had to do with Niẓām al-Mulk’s opposition to the sultan’s increasingly brazen attempts to remove the caliph. For more, see Safi 2006, 74–77. For an analysis which argues that a Nizārī Ismāʿīli assassin was responsible for the murder, see Glassen 1981, 152.
the esotericists (bāṭiniyya) (Mitha 2001, 19). Some scholars have taken the conception of the caliphate as radically dependent on the sultan and his military power (shawka) found in this work as an indication that al-Ghazālī’s political thought was determinedly realist while others have instead argued that his emphasis on the caliphate as providing the religious and moral framework for the ordering of all society, including the sultanate, demonstrated his refusal to utterly acquiesce to the demands of power politics.

Regardless of one’s view on this matter, an examination of al-Ghazālī’s life and work during this period reveals a growing recognition that a Muslim community which overly relied on the policies of the political regime for its stability and flourishing was bound to be

---

50 During most of the period of Saljūq rule, the Ismāʿīlī Fāṭamids were their greatest ideological and military foes. Seeking to reunite Muslims under a new ‘Alid caliphate, the Fāṭamids established a capital in Cairo which soon became a nexus and center of intellectual, commercial, and cultural life. Their notion of religious authority was based on the Shiʿite concept of the infallible imām and grounded in a Neoplatonic cosmology and its application of an allegorical system of interpretation to the Qurʾān, Sunna, and Islamic law. This hermeneutic was epistemically predicated on the distinction between the exoteric, or outer (zāhir), truths and the esoteric, or inner (bāṭin), truths of revelation, to which access was achieved only via the imām. Of the Baghdad-Cairo rivalry, Farouk Mitha writes that it was “a rich metaphor pointing to the two contesting visions of Islam. It was this contest that spurred al-Ghazālī into polemic. For al-Ghazālī, the entire Shiʿi Islmaili enterprise of the Fatamids represented the ‘wholly other’, with whom no compromise was possible. The Shiʿi Imam’s claim to infallible authority challenged the very premises of the Sunni legal tradition, and hence also the raison d’être of the Sunni ‘ulamā’” (2001, 21).

51 Omid Safi points to the tendency of past scholars to focus on one of al-Ghazālī’s political treatises and extrapolate his political theory from that. For example, Leonard Binder directed almost all of his attention to The Balanced Book on What-To-Believe (al-Iqtiṣād fī l-iʿtiqād) while Lambton’s analysis was primarily confined to The Counsel for Kings (Naṣīḥat al-mulūk). Instead Safi argues for the importance of following the chronology of al-Ghazālī’s political writings throughout his life in order to ascertain the degree to which his views evolved over time. From the Scandal of the Esotericists to the later written Counsel for Kings, Safi observes a “rupture” where al-Ghazālī “gradually shifts from talking about the caliphate to a cooperation of the caliphate and the sultanate and ends with a frank justification of Saljūq Turks as being the people to whom God has given ‘raw power’ (shawka)” (2006, 111). Carole Hillenbrand too takes this chronological approach to al-Ghazālī’s political writings, and while she agrees with Safi that al-Ghazālī’s political thought reflects his attempts to accommodate the realities of his day, she argues, contrary to Safi, that “there is a considerable degree of consistency in al-Ghazālī’s views on government” (1988, 92). To a significant degree, the debate on the supposed trajectory of al-Ghazālī political thought has hinged on whether one believes that he authored the second half of the Counsel for Kings which remains a contested matter. It is in the second half of this treatise that one finds, for instance, a discussion of the sultanate which excludes any mention of the caliphate. For more on this debate, see Safi 2006, 115–21.
disappointed. According to the *Deliverer*, al-Ghazālī experienced a spiritual crisis in 488/1095 which robbed him of his ability to speak and eat, after which he set out on a two year sojourn through Damascus, Jerusalem, Medina, and Mecca. While it is impossible to determine the veracity of this account, there is no doubt that al-Ghazālī cut his ties with the regime shortly after the deaths of the vizier, sultan, and caliph, and removed himself from Baghdad’s halls of power and the public prestige he had previously enjoyed in order to travel throughout the Levant.

During this time, he states that he traveled to the tomb of Abraham in Hebron and took an oath never again to voluntarily visit or accept any recompense from a sultan or to engage in sectarian debates. In many ways, this oath represented a new focus in al-Ghazālī’s life and thought on the community and its leaders rather than the rulers as providing the surest foundation for the moral ordering of society. Garden writes that during this period, al-Ghazālī began to formulate a new relationship between the government and the pious individual which held that “[r]ather than politics guaranteeing a stable environment for the pursuit of individual piety, it was individual piety that would be responsible for guiding the ruler to rule justly” (2014, 27). Carole Hillenbrand too has observed this development and taken it to indicate a quietism that came to characterize al-Ghazālī’s thought which, as evidenced by the *Revival*, took individual piety and salvation as its *raison d’être*.52 Garden and Hillenbrand thus agree in their assessment that the *Revival* marks a shift in al-Ghazālī’s thinking; however, they part ways on the issue of quietism for while Hillenbrand views the *Revival* and al-Ghazālī’s later life in such a light, Garden considers it to be the centerpiece of his project of religious and social revival which, even

---

52 Of this period in al-Ghazālī’s life and thought, Hillenbrand writes that, “[i]t is perhaps possible to trace his increasing disillusionment with the political systems of his time in the years after his crisis and his departure from Baghdad. Indeed, one may even detect him adopting a quietist stance, and thus emphasizing personal piety and the transitory nature of this world. Given the turbulent times in which his lot was cast, that response had much to recommend it” (1988, 93).
following his departure from Baghdad and eventual return to Nishapur in 499/1106, he actively promoted through correspondence and meetings with peers, students, and political administrators of the Saljūq regime (134–42). And more germane to our discussion, a further reason why Garden argues against conceiving the Revival in quietest terms stems from al-Ghazālī’s unprecedented treatment of the duty to “command right and forbid wrong.”

As mentioned above, the Revival focuses on the “Science of Praxis” (ʿilm al-muʿāmala) which blends law, Şūfism, and philosophy; however, this science, along with the “Science of Unveiling” (al-ʿilm al-mukāshafa), together constitute the “Science of the Hereafter” (ʿilm al-ākhira) which is meant to equip one with the resources necessary for achieving felicity in the afterlife (al-saʿāda al-ukhwawiyya). Although the Revival is unique in how it pulls from jurisprudence, treatises on the cultivation of character like Miskawayh’s Refinement of Character (Tahdhīb al-akhlāq), and Şūfī handbooks such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makki’s (d. 386/998) Nourishment of the Hearts (Qūt al-qulūb), in doing so it stands in a literary tradition which combined philosophical ethics and the religious sciences (Griffel 2009, 48). Al-Ghazālī sought to obscure this by presenting the “Science of the Hereafter” as a reformation of the religious sciences which returned them to their pristine and forgotten state during the time of the “righteous forbearers” (al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ) (1937–38, 1:3). This was required because the practitioners of the law and theology had corrupted the Muslim community by treating their disciplines as means to acquire wealth and notoriety in this world at the expense of righteousness in the next. Therefore, only by executing this return could the flourishing of the community be

---

53 Al-Ghazālī’s Persian letters reveal that he corresponded with other scholars and court officials in order to recruit students who might practice and propagate his vision of religious reform. Some of these individuals became his disciples, most notably Fakhr al-Mulk (d. 500/1106), son of al-Ghazālī’s former patron, Niẓām al-Mulk, and vizier to the Saljūq King of the East, Sanjar (d. 552/1157) (Garden 2014, 138).
assured, and, al-Ghazālī asserted, the “Science of the Hereafter” would expedite this process. Although a creative amalgamation of his own devising, al-Ghazālī was deft in presenting this science as a return to the earliest generations of the believers, including even the founders of the four Sunnī legal schools, a rhetorical strategy Garden refers to as a “narrative of revival” (2014, 115).

In the first of the forty books constituting the Revival entitled the Book of Knowledge (Kitāb al-ʿilm), al-Ghazālī discusses the intellect, the division of the sciences, and the knowledge which leads to felicity in the afterlife. The key to this knowledge is the “Science of the Hereafter” which al-Ghazālī argues should stand over and above theology and the law at the top of the hierarchy of the religious sciences. It is composed of both practical (“Science of Praxis”) and theoretical elements (“Science of Unveiling”) which function interdependently in the psycho-spiritual formation of the believer (Gianotti 2011, 598).

In making this two-part division within the religious sciences, al-Ghazālī followed the Aristotelian and Avicennan tradition according to which knowledge was categorized as belonging to either the “theoretical” (physics, mathematics, and metaphysics) or the “practical” (politics, ethics, and economics) domains (Gilʿadi 1989, 83). In al-Ghazālī’s conceptual framework, however, his adaptation of

\[54\] Although both sciences operate interdependently, Gianotti points out they stand in a hierarchical relationship where the theoretical supersedes the more praxis-oriented science even as it remains dependent on it (2011, 601).

\[55\] Following the work of Gilʿadi 1989 and Treiger 2008, Garden points out that one finds a similar division of the sciences in al-Ghazālī’s Scale of Action (Mīzān al-ʿamal); however, there they are referred to as “Theoretical Science” (al-ʿilm al-nazārī) and “Practical Science” (al-ʿilm al-ʿamalī). As it turns out, the descriptions of these two sciences in this work closely correspond to the “Science of Unveiling” and the “Science of Praxis” found in the Revival. Based on this and other evidence, Garden argues that the Scale was a sort of first draft for the Revival, both of which evidence a preoccupation specifically with ethics and more broadly with practical science. However, due to his desire to reach a broader audience, al-Ghazālī attempted to play down the philosophical influences at work in the Revival by renaming the two sciences according to the language of Ṣūfism and focusing on the “Science of Praxis” alone (2014, 30, 69). For a corroborating analysis, see Sherif 1975, 11.
this division was informed by a creative synthesis of Avicennan cosmology, Ash’arite theology, Şūfism, and jurisprudence.\(^56\) Though these two sciences together constitute the “Science of the Hereafter,” al-Ghazālī states that the focus of the Revival is to be the “Science of Praxis” rather than the “Science of the Unveiling” which, as he puts it, belongs in no book (1937–38, 1:5). In speaking this way, he referred to a realm of knowledge of the religious sciences, the human heart, and the Hereafter which is accessible only to the few (khāṣṣah), as opposed to the multitudes (ʿāmmah), who have been initiated into its mysteries (1:14).\(^57\) Al-Ghazālī intended the Revival to appeal to a wide range of religious scholars beyond an elite trained in the methods of philosophy and Şūfism, and as a result, it centers almost entirely on the “Science of Praxis” which is further divided into an exterior (ẓāhir) science of bodily action and an interior (bāṭin) science of spiritual states. The Revival’s first half which deals with ritual matters and daily customs relates to the former science while the second half addressing destructive vices and redemptive virtues falls under the purview of the latter one.

\(^56\) The precise relationship between these elements of al-Ghazālī’s thought, especially the Avicennan and Ash’arite ones, has long been debated. In his comprehensive study of al-Ghazālī’s philosophical theology, Griffel seeks to reconcile these strands which seem at odds with one another. In the introduction to his attempt at conceptual therapy, he writes that, “[p]erched between the Ash’arite and the Avicennan poles, al-Ghazālī develops his own cosmology. Al-Ghazālī was a very systematic thinker, and given that the Avicennan system is much more systematic than the Ash’arite one, it is unsurprising that his synthesis owes much more to Avicenna than to al-Asḥārī. Through his analysis, he finds a very elegant path toward adopting Avicenna’s determinist cosmology while remaining a Muslim theologian who wishes to preserve God’s free choice over His actions” (2009, 11–12).

\(^57\) While Şūfism provided a suitable path for the spiritually adept to achieve felicity in the afterlife, it was the rational investigation of an elite group which al-Ghazālī discussed in the Scale and referred to as the “Theoreticians” (nuẓẓār) that proved itself a surer method still (Garden 2014, 101–02). This was so because as philosophically trained scholars, they were able to apply the epistemic standard of rational demonstration (burhān al-ʿaql) in order to prevent the uncritical acceptance of ecstatic experience found among Şūfis. However, far from being antithetical to the Şūfism, the “Theoreticians” endorsed the Şūfi emphasis on praxis as the most effective means of taming the passions and themselves pursued this path in conjunction with one that was more philosophically inclined. Moreover, al-Ghazālī spoke of Şūfi practice as a live option for a subset of the “Theoreticians” (“the elite of the elite”) who possessed the requisite capabilities to attain a more profound mystical knowledge than that made possible by rational enquiry alone. As Garden notes, al-Ghazālī surely considered himself a candidate for this hybrid path (48–49).
Al-Ghazâlî’s views on ethics are found in the Book of Knowledge (Kitâb al-ʿilm), which introduces the Revival’s first two quarters, as well as in the Book of the Explanation of the Wonders of the Heart (Kitâb al-sharḥ al-ʿajâʾ ib al-qalb) and the Book of Training the Soul, Refining Character, and Treating the Diseases of the Heart (Kitâb riyâdat al-nafs wa tâdhîb al-akhlâq wa muʿālajat amrâḍ al-qalb), both of which preface the latter two quarters. Quoting the prophetic hadîth which states, “[s]eeking knowledge (ʿilm) is a duty for every Muslim,” al-Ghazâlî declares that even though practitioners of other disciplines such as jurisprudence and theology have claimed that this saying refers to their science, it in fact is best understood as referring to devotional practice (mūʿamalah). Consequently, the “Science of Praxis” (ʿilm al-mūʿamalah) is an individual duty (farḍ ʿayn) (1937–38, 1:15). Of central concern to the “Science of Praxis” is the science of ethics, or character formation (ʿilm al-akhlâq), which seeks to integrate knowledge (ʿilm) and practice (ʿamal) into a seamless framework that leads to the flourishing and salvation of the soul (nafs) by purging its vices and refining its virtues.58 Citing Q. 38:71–72 which speaks of God implanting the divine soul into malleable human clay, al-Ghazâlî states that character is best understood as a stable state of the soul in which deeds are carried out easily and without need of thought, and that “if this state produces beautiful deeds which are rationally and religiously praiseworthy, then this state is called good character (khuluq

58 Mohamed Sherif goes so far as to argue that al-Ghazâlî’s “Science of Praxis” receives its coherence and central animating force from the conceptual framework provided by virtue theory. Writing of the virtue of the love of God which, for al-Ghazâlî, ensures felicity in the afterlife, Sherif states that it “is not itself a form of knowledge; rather, it is a positive disposition of a passion which results from the knowledge of God in this life. If man wants to attain ultimate happiness in the hereafter, according to Ghazali, every knowledge and every action during his life must be directed to acquiring the virtue of love of God. Thus, Ghazali’s theory of virtue is not only the central theme of his ethics but also the central issue which gives unity to his thought” (1975, 169).
ḥasan) and if bad deeds proceed from it, it is called bad character (khuluq sayaa)” (1937–38, 2:1434–35 (90–91)).

In order for noble acts to issue forth from the soul with ease, its faculties must be trained through a process of habituation so that one might attain the proper disposition to perform them without reflection or strain. When trained, the rational faculty (quwwat al-ʿilm) produces the virtue of practical wisdom (hikma), the irascible faculty (quwwat al-ghaḍab) realizes the virtue of courage (shujāʿa), and the appetitive faculty (quwwat al-shahwa) brings forth the virtue of temperance (ʿiffā) (1937–38, 2:1435–36). When the latter two have been subordinated to the rational faculty, the virtue of justice (ʿadl) is achieved.

Al-Ghazālī employs an allegory to illustrate the relationship between these faculties in which the body is likened to a city (madīna), the exterior and interior perceptive faculties to its army, desire (shahwah) and anger (ghaḍab) to its enemies, and the intellect (ʿaql) to its sovereign (1937–38, 2:1350). Though this parable portrays desire and anger in antagonistic terms, they both are capable of being harnessed and properly directed. One knows that the faculties have been properly directed and attained the status of virtue when they produce the mean (wasaṭ) between excess and deficiency, both of which are considered vices (1937–38, 2:1436 (92)). Thus, when the irascible faculty is unsound and imbalanced, the excess of recklessness or the deficiency of cowardice result; however, when it has achieved a state of equilibrium, it yields the virtue of courage.

Commenting on the genealogy of this particular formulation, T.J. Winter writes that, “with certain slight variants, [it] is commonplace in Islamic discussions of ethics. Its source is an ethical treatise by Galen, lost in Greek, but whose Arabic summary has been published….The wording chosen by Ghazālī leaves little doubt that he came across this definition through the medium of Miskawayh’s Tahdīḥ al-akhlaq…” (1995, 17). Of note is that while al-Ghazālī followed this Muslim philosophical tradition in basic outline, he modified it in significant ways, one way being that both the intellect and religious law (al-sharʿ) serve as the criteria by which to measure the praiseworthiness of an action.

While the virtue of justice results from the proper equilibrium between these three faculties, al-Ghazālī points out that it also serves as the actualizing power (qudra) for bringing the irascible and appetitive faculties into harmony with the rational faculty (1937–38, 2:1436 (92)).
While the cultivation of the philosophic virtues of courage, temperance, practical
wisdom, and justice is necessary for attaining felicity in the hereafter, it is not sufficient without
divine aid in the form of the theological virtues. These theological virtues include repentance
(tawba), patience (sabr), gratitude (shukr), fear (khawf), hope (rajā'), proper intention (niyyah),
sincerity (ikhlās), truthfulness (ṣidq), and trust (tawakkul), all of which are considered stations
(maqāmat) along the way to the love (muhabbah) of God. For al-Ghazālī, the theological
virtues serve as a form of divine assistance (tawfīq) which he defines as the harmony of the
believer’s will and action with God’s determination (1937–38, 3:2247–48). There is a sense in
which human will and habituation form the primary basis for the philosophic virtues while God’s
aid does so for the theological ones; however, this would establish clear boundaries where, for
al-Ghazālī, there are none. That is, just as with the philosophic virtues, human will and
habituation play an essential role in acquiring the theological virtues, and the divine assistance
required for the cultivation of the theological virtues is indispensable in the attainment of
philosophic ones as well. Speaking to the way in which supernatural aid undergirds the pursuit of
both sets of virtues, Mohamed Sherif notes that according to al-Ghazālī, without God’s support,
no individual can achieve happiness and therefore there is no guarantee that the philosophic
virtues will lead to their allotted goal; moreover, “[t]hey may even be self-defeating … because
they can be signs of man’s insubordination to God’s will” (1975, 84).

61 These theological virtues are discussed in the first seven books of the Revival’s fourth and final
quarter which addresses the “qualities of salvation” (al-sīfāt al-munjiyāt). For a more in-depth analysis
of these virtues, see Sherif 1975, 105–55.
62 Al-Ghazālī’s Ash’arite predilections are very much on display in this formulation. While he
embraced elements of Avicennan thought and the broader Islamic philosophical tradition, especially in
terms of their ethical psychology, he continued to hold positions on causality and the relationship between
divine and human agency that owed much to Ash’arism. For more on this, see Sherif 1975, 84–86 and
In the quest to realize the philosophic and theological virtues, steadfast adherence to ritual obligations, daily customs, and spiritual exercises is crucial. In this way, the movement through the *Revival* is an evolutionary one as the believer moves up the ladder of increasing character formation and God-consciousness (*taqwa*); however, rather than leaving behind one’s legal obligations as if they belonged to an earlier and now obsolete stage of enlightenment, the duties one has to one’s fellow members of the community remain essential. Writing in opposition to the antinomian tendencies of those Ṣūfis who declared loyalty to the law and other outward forms of devotion to be superfluous, al-Ghazālī asserts that whether one stands at the beginning or the end of the path to felicity in the hereafter, adherence to the dictates of the law never becomes obsolescent (1937–38, 2:1474 (130)). This is so because while the process of ethical formation includes as its goal the liberation of the soul from the bondage of embodiment, the body itself serves as a necessary tool in this endeavor. As such, the law along with spiritual practices such as meditative remembrance (*dhikr*), fasting (*ṣawm*), and asceticism (*zuhd*) function as technologies for the care of the self, shaping both the body and psyche which operate symbiotically in the cultivation of character. That is, the discipline of the body experienced in the performance of the law or spiritual practice brings with it greater spiritual insight which then further informs one’s carrying out of the practice and expands their understanding and appreciation of its benefits.

As Moosa notes, in the sections of the *Revival* addressing legal ritual obligations and daily customs, al-Ghazālī often discussed the ethical content of these practices through the category of etiquette or comportment (*adāb*) (2005, 219–20). For al-Ghazālī, *adāb* functions as a
means of education which conceives of practical knowledge as belief that leads to action.\(^{63}\)

Implicit in this definition is the expectation that knowledge is to be practiced, and as such, this paradigm exemplifies the interconnectedness of knowledge (‘ilm) and practice (‘amal) that was so crucial to the “Science of Praxis.” Attention to \(\text{adāb}\), then, prepares the believer for the proper understanding and performance of the law (fiqh); however, the law too serves to bolster \(\text{adāb}\).

Elucidating the relationship between these two elements in al-Ghazālī’s thought, Moosa writes:

Even though the disciplinary practice of \(\text{adab}\) prepares the ground for the proper inner conditions of the soul to be governed by fiqh, there is a dialogical relationship between the cultivation of the self through knowledge and living according to the law. Sometimes, one gets the sense that Ghazālī believed that the practices of fiqh were meant to reinforce the dispositions cultivated by \(\text{adab}\) …. On other occasions, one gets the sense from Ghazālī that \(\text{adab}\) is really the glue that binds fiqh to the self or, to use a different expression, that he sought to grow fiqh in the fertile ground of \(\text{adab}\). (Ibid.)

While individual effort and formal training in the religious sciences enable one to grasp the ethical content of ritual obligations and social customs by way of \(\text{adāb}\) and the law, al-Ghazālī states that understanding the higher truths provided by the mystical tradition of Şūfism requires the guidance of a shaykh or spiritual master (murshīd). Just as those new to the faith are in need of an imām to lead them in prayer, so too do those seeking to enter into the deeper mysteries of the faith need a shaykh for the path of religion is obscure and the ways of Satan are many (1937–38, 2:1474–75 (130–31)). Thus, in the journey to felicity in the hereafter, one relies on an ever

\(^{63}\) Moosa points to historian of late Graeco-Roman antiquity Peter Brown’s discussion of the parallels between \(\text{adāb}\) and the Greek concept of paideia which, Brown indicates, shared \(\text{adāb}\)’s comprehensive focus on intellectual, psychological, and physiological formation. For a Graeco-Roman gentleman striving to live according to the ideals of paideia, bodily posture, inflection of voice, and proper performance of gestures, along with intellectual development, all were considered interdependent factors that testified to one’s excellence or virtue (arête). While both of these concepts exhibited significant similarities, they diverged in that, as Brown observes, Hellenistic forms of paideia possessed no religious code and imposed no religious sanction. Moreover, in contrast to paideia, the norms of \(\text{adāb}\) were viewed as applicable to all believers rather than a select few, and the manners and forms of comportment it prescribed were intended to equip individuals for various types of social engagements as opposed to later forms of Christian paideia pursued by monastic orders which increasingly considered such ethical formation to require ascetic withdrawal from wider society (1984, 29–30).
greater number of social practices and relationships that enable progress in both the vertical
dimensions of worship and the horizontal dimensions of social interactions. And as with the
conceptual pairs of body/soul and *adāb*/law discussed above, the vertical and horizontal stand in
a relationship of mutual dependence in the way that intentions and actions characterizing
behavior along both axes inform and implicate one another. Key for al-Ghazālī was the fact that
as one reaches ascending levels of metaphysical understanding, certain prosaic realities such as
embodiment, etiquette, and the legal obligations one has to God and fellow members of the
community never cease to be imperative.

Al-Ghazālī’s theory of virtue which undergirds his ethics captures the interdependence of
the vertical and horizontal by conceiving of character formation as the result of activities carried
out on both individual and social levels. Admitting that rituals (*ʿibādāt*) such as ablutions,
prayer, fasting, and meditative remembrance play a more central role in the perfection of the soul
for al-Ghazālī, Ira Lapidus writes that social actions (*ʿādāt*) such as table manners, friendship,
and “commanding right and forbidding wrong” are vital as well because “[g]ood relations among
people is one of the goods of this world that aids in the acquisition of qualities for the next. Good
conduct toward others helps create good character” (1984, 48). And pointing out that the
“Science of Praxis” (*ʿilm al-muʿāmalāt*) discussed in the *Revival* may also be translated as the
“knowledge of transactions,” Moosa notes that this science assumes a social dimension which is
essential to the process of developing a virtuous believer. In fact, he writes, we might talk of al-
Ghazālī as having an “ethics of responsibility” in which “[i]ntersubjectivity … was essentially
about proper and normative modes of conduct between the ethical subject on the one hand and
both the divine and fellow human beings on the other hand” (2005, 230).
One area in the *Revival* where we find a more social vehicle for the cultivation of virtue is book nineteen of the second quarter on social customs which addresses the duty to “command right and forbid wrong.” In his discussion of this duty, Garden highlights the ways in which it builds on those elements focused in more individual ways on piety and salvation by expanding the scope of responsibility outwards to encompass not just one’s self but one’s family, friends, neighbors, and beyond. He further observes that this way of relating the overlapping spheres of obligation that begin with the self and radiate outwards can be found in the broader Aristotelian tradition of ethics which pervaded Muslim philosophy (2014, 86–87).

As discussed above, the *Revival* played a central role in al-Ghazālī’s larger project of reform and revival which he undertook in the aftermath of the collapse of the Saljūq-ʿAbbāsid order. In many ways, his project was motivated by his disillusionment with the ability of political authority to maintain the social cohesion and moral ordering of society. Rather, the proper ordering of society was to be grounded in individual piety and, as we have just read, the theory of virtue undergirding this process entails a social dimension. Within al-Ghazālī’s ethical schema, the duty to “command right and forbid wrong” plays a crucial role in fostering the more public elements of virtue and

---

64 One can find specific reference to this notion of an outward expanding scope of responsibility in the section of the book on “commanding right and forbidding wrong” where al-Ghazālī discusses “Wrongs in General” (1937–38, 2:1249).

65 For an example of this paradigm in which the cultivation of character necessarily entails a social dimension, see Elizabeth Bucar’s essay on the philosophical ethics of Miskawayh (2015, 205–08).

66 In discussing al-Ghazālī’s conception of “commanding right and forbidding wrong,” Garden comments on Cook’s claim that the duty and its discourse are unique to the Muslim world. In response, he writes, “[b]ut we could look at it differently: if al-Ghazālī’s discussion of the concept set the tone for its subsequent understanding, and if al-Ghazālī’s conception was ultimately Aristotelian, then this unique feature of Islamic discourse is simultaneously the continuation of Aristotelianism—albeit in radically revised form—within that tradition” (2014, 87). Such an analysis which looks to the Aristotelian elements of various religious traditions has implications for comparative religious ethics more generally which are surely worth pursuing. See Cook 2000, 583–84 for his comments on the uniqueness of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” to the Muslim world; however, it should be noted that the chapter where these comments may be found discusses parallels to the duty and its discourse found in other religious and non-religious traditions throughout the ancient and modern worlds.
piety, and as such, it may be viewed as a social practice required for the cultivation of character that considers communal responsibility and social engagement to be necessary elements of the path to felicity in the hereafter.

It is important to recall that al-Ghazālī’s account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” was larger than previous treatments by, as Cook writes, “an order of magnitude” (2000, 427). It is partly for this reason that his discussion of the duty subsequently went on to become the single most influential one, shaping understandings of the obligation well into the modern period. He begins by declaring that it is the most important pole star in religion and the reason why all of the prophets had been sent by God (1937–38, 2:1186). Citing the Qurʾān, Sunna, and consensus (ijmāʿ) of the scholars, he states that the duty is a collective one (fard kifāya), incumbent on every believer unless performed by someone else. In support of this conclusion, he adduces as exegetical support one of the verses most often discussed in commentaries on the duty, Q. 3:104 which includes the phrase “[a]nd let there be from you a community …” (wa-l-takun minkum ummatun) to describe those who are to carry out the obligation. While he follows the majority of Sunnī scholars in considering it a collective rather than individual duty, he departs from the mainstream tradition by taking a more populist approach to the issue of who is permitted to command right and forbid wrong. This comes out in his discussion of the prerequisites for carrying out the obligation wherein he extends each element of the “three modes” tradition (heart, tongue, and hand) to all legally competent (mukallaf) Muslims who are in possession of the capability to perform the duty (1937–38, 2:1196, 1202–03).

---

67 While I generally follow the lead of the summaries of al-Ghazālī’s account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” found in Madelung 1981 and Cook 2000, the translations are my own.
The power to command or forbid does not necessarily bring with it the obligation to do so. Before taking action to correct a wrong, one should account for a number of contingencies from the probability of success to incurring varying degrees of the loss of life, health, knowledge, property, and reputation. For example, in the eventuality that a word or action would likely be ineffective, the obligation is nullified; however, it is recommended (tastahib) that one confront the offender in order to demonstrate to him or her the truths of Islam, especially if doing so poses no real risk to the believer performing the duty (1937–38, 2:1208). If one encounters a situation where righting a wrong would be effective but potentially bring harm to oneself, once again the duty is not required but the praiseworthy action remains to carry it out nonetheless. And in the case that commanding or forbidding would be both ineffective and dangerous for the one performing it, it not only ceases to be obligatory, it becomes forbidden. Anyone unable to prevent a transgression in any of the situations mentioned above is required to avoid the place where it occurs (Ibid.).

Al-Ghazālī defines a wrong (munkar) as that which is contrary to the law, currently being perpetrated, apparent to the one correcting the wrong without recourse to spying (bi-ghayr tajassus), and not subject to scholarly judgment (ijtīḥād) (1937–38, 2:1217). Thus, one cannot confront another for a wrong that was committed in the past or which one believes will be carried out in the future, but rather may only take action against extant illicit behavior. Citing Q. 49:12 and 24:27 which prohibit spying and backbiting, al-Ghazālī also asserts that one may not overly pry into others’ lives in search of wrongs by sneaking into a home where wine drinking is suspected or searching the clothing of another believed to be smuggling a musical instrument. Instead, one may proceed only if there is clear evidence that an offense is being committed like, for example, hearing music played from behind a wall (1937–38, 2:1219). Generally speaking,
one should command or forbid in response to those wrongs recognized by consensus (ijmāʿ) as being reprehensible. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for a member of the Shāfiʿite legal school to rebuke an adherent of the Ḥanafī school for an action that would be considered a breach of the law only from within those norms and practices unique to Shāfiʿite legal doctrine (1937–38, 2:1220). This was so because of the legal pluralism that characterized Muslim jurisprudence (uṣūl al-fiqh) wherein a range of conclusions on a certain legal matters was permitted. Thus, the imposition of one school’s doctrines on another would violate this tradition.

For al-Ghazālī, the process by which one was to carry out the duty involved an escalating sequence of eight levels (darajāt) ranging from seeking information and exhortation to physical action and the organization of armed helpers. In their entirety, the eight levels include 1) enquiry (taʿarruf) into the nature of the act; 2) informing (taʿrīf) the potentially ignorant offender; 3) exhortation and admonition (al-waʿz waʾl-nuṣḥ); 4) harsh language (al-sabb waʾl-taʿnīf biʾl-qawl al-ghalīz al-khashin); 5) physical action (al-taghyīr bil-yad); 6) intimidation and threat (al-tahdīd waʾl-takhwīf); 7) direct assault (mubāsharat al-ḍarb); and 8) the use of armed helpers (aʿwān) to perform the duty (1937–38, 2:1226–33). In what follows, al-Ghazālī discusses at length each of these types of responses to illicit behavior and the various situations in which they might be appropriate. Of note is that while this sequence of action follows the “three modes” paradigm in its inclusion of both verbal and physical confrontation, one is to ascend up the scale of escalating levels only as much as is required to effectively right the wrong.

Al-Ghazālī stoked substantial controversy with his assertion that in the eventuality that violent action was called for, one could not only take such action, but one could even organize a group of armed helpers without the sovereign’s permission to perform the duty. If violence was required in a situation involving, for example, wine casks or the removal of someone from an
unlawful place, then one should proceed without weapons by inflicting blows with the hand or the foot. If the use of weapons is called for, then this is permitted as long as it does not lead to disorder (fitna) (1232). The final level involves the collection of armed helpers when one cannot accomplish the duty alone. Al-Ghazālī notes the disagreements over whether one must seek the ruler’s permission before endeavoring to gather such a group, but he concludes that the performance of the duty at this level without the authority’s permission is only a logical extension of previous levels where such permission was not required. In general, it is uncommon for matters to reach such an impasse, but the responsibility is there in principle (1233). While al-Ghazālī permitted the organization of armed helpers for the purpose of commanding or forbidding those inhabiting their communities, he did not tolerate rebellion. When the wrongdoer is a ruler, there is no problem with informing and exhorting, but individual subjects may not have recourse to the use of force or violence as this leads to disorder (fitna), which often only worsens the situation (1250). Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī was no quietist for he enthusiastically praised those who took their lives in their hands and rebuked unjust rulers in harsh and uncompromising language, a duty he claimed was far too seldomly performed by the scholars of his day who loved the things of this world (1274–75). This was very much in keeping with the prophetic tradition recorded by Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889) which quotes Muḥammad as saying, “The best jihād is the word of justice in front of the oppressive sultan.”

Following his discussion of the escalating levels of response to the commission of wrongs, al-Ghazālī identifies a set of ideal qualities (ṣifāt) beyond the minimal requirements of

---

68 However, while the individual use of force to depose a ruler was condemned by al-Ghazālī, his attitude slightly but importantly differed toward rebels (bughāh) who possessed adequate numbers and power (shawka) as well as a viable scriptural justification for their grievances (taʾwīl). Although he was less tolerant of rebels than many Shāfiʿite jurists, he was not willing to support rulers without reservation. For more, see Abou El Fadl 2001, 183–84.
being a legally competent adult Muslim which the performer should possess so that he or she might carry out the duty with the necessary propriety and etiquette (adāb). These include knowledge (ʿilm), pious devotion (waraʾ), and good character (husn al-khuluq) (1937–38, 2:1234). An individual with the proper knowledge will be aware of the occasions, courses, and limits of commanding and forbidding, and, due to their pious devotion and fear of God, others will listen to their words and admonitions. Striving for these qualities is vital because those who live in ways that are corrupt and indecent (fāsiq) and still attempt to right wrongs only make a mockery of the obligation and prevent offenders from heeding them. While knowledge and pious devotion are necessary for the proper performance of the duty, they are not sufficient because only with good character can one confront an offender in a way that avoids uncontrolled anger (ghaḍab) and exhibits patience (ṣabr), kindness (lutf), and courteousness (rifq). To command or forbid with such anger or cursing (shatm) is to have forgotten the nature of the duty and to be unmindful of the religion of God in one’s attempt to carry it out (Ibid.). In this identification of “good character” as necessary for a believer to effectively command and forbid, we are able to situate al-Ghazālī’s discussion of this duty within his larger ethical framework. In doing so, we find not only that the possession of good character and the concomitant virtues help to ensure that one will perform the duty in the proper manner, but also that in the duty’s very execution, virtues such as sincerity (ikhlās) and patience (ṣabr) are further cultivated.

69 Of note is that Michael Cook translates husn al-khuluq as “even temperament,” but when al-Ghazālī’s account of commanding and forbidding is placed in the context of his ethical thought more broadly, we find that translating this term instead as “good character” resonates more fully with the central elements of his theological anthropology (2000, 442).
Conclusion

As the above makes clear, al-Ghazālī’s account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” far supersedes others in its scope and intricacy. We find in it not only the inclusion of certain conventional elements of the discourse such as the “three modes” tradition and commentary on key Qurʾānic texts like 3:104, but we also find detailed attention to other aspects of the duty such as the definition of the category of wrong (*munkar*), the process by which to escalate action against wrong doers, and the ideal qualities for those performing the duty. As Cook notes, its originality and elaborate conceptual architecture are unique to al-Ghazālī (2000, 447). In light of al-Ghazālī’s experience of the collapse of the Saljūq-ʿAbbāsid order and his subsequent decision to launch a project of religious and social reform, its extent and comprehensive nature should come as no surprise. At one time a prominent member of the scholarly establishment in one of the most powerful Islamicate political orders of his day, in the period from 485/1092 to 488/1095, al-Ghazālī found himself confronted with the assassination or death of his patrons which included the vizier, sultan, and caliph. In the aftermath of these tumultuous developments and the contentious struggles for succession that followed, al-Ghazālī left Baghdad and set out on a revivalist project that would continue to occupy him for the remainder of his life. The decision to depart Baghdad and initiate this project in many ways stemmed from his realization that a Muslim community which overly relied on its rulers for its stability and flourishing was bound to be disappointed. During this period in his life, al-Ghazālī’s life and thought developed a new focus on the community and its leaders rather than the rulers as providing the surest foundation for the moral ordering of society, and key to this vision was the cultivation of individual and communal piety.
The centerpiece of this effort was the *Revival* which focused on the “Science of Praxis” (*ʿilm al-mūʿamalah*), a practical science addressing both the exterior (*ẓāhir*) realm of bodily action and the interior (*bāṭin*) one of spiritual states. Undergirding and providing coherence to the exterior and the interior elements of the “Science of Praxis” was the science of ethics, or character formation (*ʿilm al-akhlāq*), which integrates knowledge (*ʿilm*) and practice (*ʿamal*) into a framework that both disciplines the body and cultivates the requisite virtues for the flourishing and salvation of the soul. In its reliance on Platonic, Aristotelian, and Avicennan ethical psychology and virtue theory, this conceptual framework was heavily indebted to the philosophical tradition; however, it also employed both legal ritual obligations and Ṣūfī practice to effect ethical excellence thorough a process of habituation. Informed as it was by law, Ṣūfīsm, and philosophy, the “Science of Praxis” not only addressed both the exterior and the interior, it also conceived of character formation as taking place on both individual and social levels which functioned interdependently in the process of cultivating virtue. Thus, caring for the poor or confronting abuses of political power were just as much tied to the development of one’s devotional life as was prayer, fasting, and *dhikr*. In this way, a certain “intersubjectivity” was built into al-Ghazālī’s theory of virtue wherein good relations among the community of believers and their neighbors in this world helped prepare it for the next. As such, the duty to “command right and forbid wrong” played a crucial role in fostering the more public elements of virtue and piety which constituted the “Science of Praxis” and therefore may be viewed as a social practice required for the cultivation of character that considered social and political engagement as necessary elements of the path to felicity in the hereafter.

Unsurprisingly, with its comprehensive and populist approach, the account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” presented in the *Revival* would later be found
attractive by organizers of early modern and modern Muslim social movements. Beyond this, al-
Ghazâlî’s life and thought exemplified for these movements a broad “reformist middle way”
within Islamic history that sought to reconcile religious knowledge (ʿilm) and the mystical
traditions of Şūfism (taṣawwuf) (Weismann 2001b, 207). By providing a model of ethical
formation which attended to the exterior and interior elements of Muslim devotional life, al-
Ghazâlî and his Revival imparted concepts and social practices not only for a socially engaged
vision of religious reform, but also for the spiritual formation (tarbīya) required for cultivating
effective activists. Moreover, the emphasis found in the Revival on a certain level of knowledge
and pious virtue being accessible to the few (khawāṣṣ) rather than the multitudes (ʿawāmm)
translated well into an elitism that characterized later movements which posited visions of
societal change led by a vanguard (ṭalîʿah). These elements led the Revival to be considered one
of the ur-texts for later renewal (tajdīd) and reform (ʾiṣlāḥ) social movements, from the Muslim
Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria to the Jamaʿat-e-Islāmī on the Indian subcontinent (Moosa 2005,
22). As we will see in subsequent chapters, this was especially the case for al-Bannā’, Ḥawwa,
and Yassine who looked to al-Ghazâlî as a paradigm for their “Salafî Şūfism” which entailed a
sharīʿa-minded approach to Şūfism. Though in differing ways, each of these three figures
appropriated elements from al-Ghazâlî’s ethical thought broadly and his account of
“commanding right and forbidding wrong” more specifically, all in the quest to organize and
cultivate a small group of dedicated believers to effect religious, social, and political change.

---

70 For more on this tradition, especially in the early modern and modern periods, see Commins
1990; Weismann 2001a; and Sirry 2011. These works point to, among others, Damascus-based reformists
such as ʿAbd al-Qâdir al-Jazâʾirî (d. 1883) and Jamâl al-Dîn al-Qâsimî (d. 1914) who saw no
contradiction between their Salafî and Şūfî commitments which had a great deal to do with their
membership in the Naqshbandî order.
CHAPTER 2

“MONKS BY NIGHT AND KNIGHTS BY DAY”: ĖḤASAN ĖL-BĀNNĀʾ, THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, AND THE RISE OF THE VIRTUOUS VANGUARD

“…among the descriptions of the Companions of Muḥammad … occurs the following, ‘Monks by night and knights by day.’ You can just see one of them at night, standing erect in his oratory, clutching his beard, sincerely murmuring and saying, ‘O world, seduce some other than myself!’ And when at the break of dawn the call to arms rang out, summoning the fighter to jihād, you would have seen him, a wolf on the back of his mount, shouting his war cry which resounded throughout the entire battlefield.”

— Ėḥasan al-Bānnāʾ, “To What Do We Summon Humankind”

Moving from the classical and post-classical periods into modernity, a pronounced shift occurred in the “commanding right and forbidding wrong” discourse wherein the duty moved from being generally understood as a “personal duty to right wrongs committed by fellow-believers as and when one encountered them” to “a systematic and organised propagation of Islamic values both within and outside the community” (Cook 2000, 515).¹ That is, conceptions of the duty moved from ones focused in the classical period on parsing the individual’s rights and responsibilities towards fellow members of their community to ones in the modern era more concerned with creating organizations and mass movements to confront the newly emerging threats of colonial occupation, acquiescent and corrupt Muslim leaders, and the encroachment of Western norms and practices.² Following the rise of a Western European led international

¹ In his discussion of uses of the naṣīḥa genre in modern Islamic thought as a form of social criticism, Talal Asad notes a similar shift. He writes, “This general situation [involving the development of the idea of Saudi society as a ‘totality’ with the ‘modernizing state’ as its central node] invites members of the Western-educated middle classes to produce critical discourses directed at mobilizing publics and to intervene thereby in the uneven movement of that totality toward its appointed goal” (Asad 1993, 226).

² One important exception to this observation is the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlīs who considered “commanding right and forbidding wrong” to be tied closely to missionary activity (daʿwa) towards fellow Muslims. The Fāṭimid missionary (dāʿī) Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Naysābūrī (fourth/tenth century)
economic and nation-state system in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, seafaring powers such as the British, French, and Dutch began to expand their influence throughout the Ottoman, Mughal, and Safavid empires as well as Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Although beginning with economic penetration through trade, the search for new markets eventually culminated in the outright occupation of territory, as was the case in the Indonesian archipelago (Netherlands, 1800), Algeria (France, 1830), the Indian subcontinent (Britain, 1857), and Egypt (Britain, 1882) (Gelvin 2016, 69-70, 90-100). During this period, newly established European colonial regimes, modern educational systems designed according to European curricula, and market economies dominated by European manufactured goods induced societal transformation and disruption. In response, a range of secular, nationalist, and religious movements were founded in order to promote political, educational, and social reform in opposition to the colonial administrations as well as those local notables who were perceived as corrupt and overly acquiescent to the colonial will.

In modern reformist scholars Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā’s (d. 1935) commentary on Q. 3:104 in the journal Tafsīr al-Manār, we find one of the earliest modern examples of Qur’ānic exegesis discussing the organization of Islamic movements for the purposes of social and religious renewal. The verse, which declares, “[a]nd argued that the duty primary fell to the imāms but extends to missionaries as well. Ibid., 302-03. Upon the establishment of a state in Egypt in the fourth/tenth century, the Fāṭimids institutionalized daʿwa and created a hierarchical organizational structure led by the imām who then had beneath him a series of chief, regional chief, and assistant dāʿī (Heinz 1997, 67-68).

3 The Tafsīr al-Manār served ʿAbduh and Riḍā’s project of social and religious reform by disseminating Qur’ānic commentary (tafsīr) based on ʿAbduh’s lectures given at al-Azhar between 1899 and 1905. Riḍā included his own exegesis as well, prefacing it with “I say” (aqūlu) in contradistinction to that of ʿAbduh which he began with “the Master said” (qāla al-ustādh al-imām). This commentary distinguished itself from more traditional ones in its attempts to address the myriad ills befalling societies throughout modern Islamdom. Although at the time of ʿAbduh’s death, it had not even covered half of the
let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful,” was interpreted by ‘Abduh and Riḍā in terms of daʿwa, or calling others to Islam. They considered this obligation to be an individual duty (fard al-ʿayn) for all Muslims; however, they realized that not every believer would be capable of performing it, and as such, it was appropriate that the bulk of commanding and forbidding fall to a subset of specially trained individuals. Consequently, they argued for a more restrictive understanding of the phrase “from you a nation” (minkum ummatun) which they claimed refers to a group (ṭāʾifa) set apart to engage in daʿwa (1999, 30-31). This society, moreover, was to be specially trained in both the traditions of the “virtuous forefathers” (al-salaf al-sāliḥ) as well as the moral and modern social sciences. With the proper intellectual training and ethical formation, this modern Muslim vanguard would be equipped to perform their duty as missionaries (dāʿīs) to “command right and forbid wrong” in a world seemingly dominated more and more politically and ideologically by European colonial and secular nationalist norms and interests (Roest Collins 1978, 274-79).

In this brief synopsis of ‘Abduh and Riḍā’s exegesis of a Qurʾānic passage central to the “commanding right and forbidding wrong” discourse, we find a seemingly incongruous blend of the populism which we observed in al-Ghazālī and the elitism that accompanies conceptions of movements as vanguards. This understanding of the duty was taken up widely throughout Qurʾān (it extends to Q. 12:52), this twelve volume commentary went on to become perhaps the most widely known tafsīr in the twentieth century (Roest Collins 1978, 274).

4 While conceptions of daʿwa as commanding and forbidding historically were directed towards those both outside of the community of believers as well as those inside of it, in the modern period, it was more often internally focused as movements and organizations sought to confront domestic challenges (Madelung 1981, 993).

5 ‘Abduh and Riḍā actually invoke al-Ghazālī when they argue that the phrase “from you a nation” applies to all believers. In this discussion, they also cite Q. 5:105 which states, “O you who have
modern Islamdom by reform (islāḥ) and renewal (tajdīd) movements confronting the staggering changes taking place in the wake of modernity and colonialism. Perhaps the most prominent and widely influential activist to do so was Ḥasan al-Bannā’ (d. 1949), founder of the Society of Muslim Brothers (al-İkhwān al-Muslimīn) (henceforth the “Society” or “Brotherhood”). A key component of his activism was his attention to ethical and spiritual formation (tarbīya) for he believed that an effective movement required activists who possessed virtuous character. In this he was greatly shaped by his own Şūfī commitments which stemmed from his membership in the Ḥašāfiyya order (tarīqa) throughout his youth and early adulthood. In fact, Şūfism shaped multiple aspects of the Brotherhood, from its programs of ethical and spiritual formation to its organizational structure presided over by the “general guide” (al-murshid al-‘ām), murshid being the same title used by those shaykhs leading Şūfī orders. Invoking an early description of the Companions (ṣaḥāba) of the prophet Muḥammad, al-Bannā’ referred to members of the Society as “monks by night and knights by day” in order to capture the interdependent way in which he conceived pious devotion and socio-political activism (1965, 139-40; 1978, 82).

In his reformist and activist employment of Şūfism, al-Bannā’ followed a tradition of scholars who sought to reconcile the exoteric religious sciences (ʿilm) and the esoteric mystical traditions (taṣawwuf) of Islam. One prominent representative of this tradition for al-Bannā’ was Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) whom I have already discussed. As we will discover, al-Bannā’ found much that was compelling about al-Ghazālī’s ability to fuse the theoretical and the practical as well as the exterior (ẓāhir) and the interior (bāṭin). Al-Bannā’ was also shaped in this

---

6 When the occasion permits, I will include alongside reference to al-Bannā’’s Majmūʿat rasāʾil (Collected Letters) the corresponding citation in Charles Wendell’s English translation from his Five Tracts (1978).
regard as a result of his participation in the Ḥašāfiyya order which held that the only legitimate beliefs and practices in Ṣūfism were those conforming to Islamic law (ṣarīʿa). In its affirmation of a “ṣarīʿa-minded” Ṣūfism as well as its commitment to commanding and forbidding, the Ḥašāfiyya stood within a larger tradition of early modern and modern Ṣūfī orders concerned with religious and social reform including the Naqshbandiyya, Sanūsiyya, and Tijāniyya.

While al-Bannāʾ was undoubtedly grateful for he all had received from his involvement with the Ḥašāfiyya, he eventually concluded that Ṣūfī orders were not viable vehicles for the religious, social, and political reform that was sorely needed in Egyptian society. Much of this stemmed from the fact that the orders, much like the jurists (ʿulamāʾ) of al-Azhar, had been subsumed under the aegis of the state and thus were considered compromised in their ability to speak out against the palace and the British colonial administration overseeing it. In al-Bannāʾ’s estimation, what was needed was a new type of organization which he defined as a Salafī message, a Sunnī way, a Ṣūfī reality, a political movement, an athletic group, a cultural-educational union, an economic enterprise, and a social idea (1965, 248). The primary objective of this organization was to effect societal transformation through educating the hearts, minds, and bodies of the Egyptian public in the ways of “true Islam” which would in turn bring about political and economic change. In order for this endeavor to succeed, a vanguard was needed to awake the slumbering masses who had unknowingly acquiesced to a reality dominated by secular European ideas and practices antithetical to Islam. The Brotherhood was that vanguard.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which al-Bannāʾ interpreted and deployed the “commanding right and forbidding wrong” discourse as a means to conceptualize the Society as a vanguard. We will find that he, like ʿAbduh and Riḍā, glossed the passages discussing
commanding and forbidding so as to provide support from within the Islamic tradition for the
creation of a movement meant to lead the way in bringing about religious and socio-political
change; however, this was not the only way in which he construed the discourse, for he also used
certain Qurʾānic passages exhorting believers to enjoin and forbid in such a way as to appeal to
the emerging nationalist consciousness sweeping the Egypt of his day. In the marketplace of
competing nationalist visions in the early twentieth century, al-Bannāʾ declared that Egypt’s
purpose and destiny resided, not in being a dominant military power or a center of cultural
production, but in commanding and forbidding among the nations of the world. For al-Bannāʾ, it
was this moral nature of Islamic nationalism that demonstrated its superiority in comparison to
other nationalisms. However, whether talking about a vanguard or an Islamic nation, al-Bannāʾ
remained steadfast in his belief that the most important element for the success of reforming the
*umma* lay in ethical and spiritual formation (*tarbīya*). As has been mentioned, he looked to
Ṣūfism to provide the conceptual resources and practices for *tarbīya*, but as we will come to see,
his views on Ṣūfism were not widely held within the Society. Early in his early writings, al-
Bannāʾ attempted to disabuse Brotherhood members of some of the misperceptions they held of
Ṣūfism, informing them of those Ṣūfī traditions which conformed to *sharīʿa* and encouraged
social engagement. However, in the 1930s as nationalist discourse and parties came to dominate
public life in Egypt, al-Bannāʾ adjusted his own discourse in order to accommodate the changing
landscape. Following his death, despite efforts by al-Bannāʾ to portray it in a positive light, the
negative attitudes which had been held by many members of the Society towards Ṣūfism only
hardened, and in many ways, this remains the case in Egypt today.
Hasan al-Banna’: An Overview of His Life and Thought

Hasan al-Banna’ was born in 1906 in the small town of Mahmudiyya located ninety miles northeast of Cairo.7 His father, Shaykh Ahmad ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Banna’ al-Sa’atī, was the imam and teacher for the local mosque, having been educated at the Ibrahim Pasha Mosque, one of the largest madrasas in the country (Krämer 2010, 2). Being both a watch-maker (hence the title “al-Sa’atī”) and someone who had received some formal religious education, he belonged to a merchant-artisan class which valued piety and learning. He produced a number of scholarly studies, including a short treatise on the prayer litany (waṣīfa) of the accomplished Moroccan Sufi and Maliki jurist Ahmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493-4) as well as a commentary on al-Shafi’i’s (d. 204/820) Musnad, a collection of ḥadīths (6-7). Consequently, al-Banna’ grew up in an environment which affirmed both religious learning as well as the practical knowledge of a trade.

In his youth, al-Banna’ received a broad traditional education in the Qur’an and ḥadīth as well as in some Arabic poetry. He studied at the mosque school of a local teacher, Shaykh Muhammad Zahrān, who like his father possessed some formal religious training and of whom he spoke fondly as having a strong emotional and spiritual connection with his students (Al-Banna’ 2011, 11). Throughout his life, al-Banna’ would strive to emulate this model when leading others as teacher or general guide. At the encouragement of Shaykh Zahrān, al-Banna’

---

7 The primary source we have to document the life of al-Banna’ is his own autobiographical material which was collected and compiled from the pages of Brotherhood newspapers and magazines. This work was eventually given the title of Mudhakkarat al-da’wa wa al-dā’iya (Memoirs of the Mission and the Missionary). Of course, considering its status as autobiography, one should maintain a critical posture when considering its accuracy. In fact, Brynjar Lia has recently argued that elements of the Memoirs which highlight certain traits possessed by al-Banna’, such as devotion to the cause and self-sacrifice, were written in response to an internal crisis in 1947 among Brotherhood leaders (2015, 223-24). Throughout this chapter, this material along with other studies from scholars such as Zakī 1980, Mitchell 1993, Lia 1998, Commins 2008, and Krämer 2010 will be used to discuss and analyze al-Banna’’s life.
and his friends formed a group which they called the “Society for Ethical Behavior” (jamaʿīyat al-aḫlāq al-adābiyya) for the purpose of encouraging each other in the cultivation of character (aḫlāq) and proper comportment (adāb); moreover, they eventually created the “Society for the Prevention of the Forbidden” (jamaʿīyat al-minaʿ al-muḥaramāt) in order to call others to pursue these same objectives through commanding and forbidding and the provision of counsel (naṣīḥa) (2011, 12, 14).

As Brynjar Lia has observed, the two most important influences al-Bannā’ during his youth were the growing nationalist fervor in opposition to the British occupation of Egypt and his involvement with Ṣūfism in the form of the Ḥaṣāfiyya order, both of which began in Maḥmūdiyya but reached their zenith in Damanhūr where al-Bannā’ enrolled in the Primary Teachers’ Training School (1998, 25). In his Memoirs, al-Bannā’ recalls the presence of British troops in his home village as well as the uprising against the British which swept Egypt in 1919, and in describing his time later in Damanhūr, he proudly speaks of the role he played in nationalist demonstrations as a student activist (2011, 26-28). The Egyptian independence movement traced its origins back to the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 following the ʿUrabī revolt. This revolt was led by Egyptian army officers against both the autocratic and mismanaged rule of Khedive Ismāʾīl Pāsha (d. 1895), grandson of the modernizer Muḥammad ʿAlī (d. 1849), as well as the European domination of the government and military. If successful, it threatened foreign investments in Egypt and enhanced the possibility that Egypt might default on its debt to Britain. Consequently, Britain invaded and occupied Egypt, establishing a system of indirect rule whereby a British consul general and his advisors worked with the hereditary dynasty in order to

---

8 Mitchell (1993, 4), Commins (2008, 126, 129), and Krämer (2010, 92) all share this perspective.
consolidate societal forces and institutions for the purposes of more efficient control. Though the British would grant Egypt nominal independence in 1922 and create a constitutional monarchy with a parliament, elections, and political parties, they continued to wield a great deal of influence over domestic affairs until their evacuation in 1956 (Gelvin 2016, 75-78, 96-100).

For al-Bannā’, his participation in protests against the British in no way conflicted with his emerging interest in Ṣūfism which had begun at the age of twelve.\(^9\) It was then that he first observed a *dhikr* session performed by members of the Ḥaṣāfī order at a mosque in Maḥmūdiyya. He eagerly studied and began to recite Zarrūq’s prayer litany (the same one commented on by his father), and he befriended some of the young Ḥaṣāfīs, including Aḥmad al-Sukkarī, who would go on to play a pivotal role in the Brotherhood (2011, 16). Upon his move to Damanhūr, he found an even larger Ḥaṣāfī community of which he quickly became an integral part, attending weekly meetings (*ḥadras*) and regularly visiting the tomb of the order’s founder, Shaykh Ḥasanayn al-Ḥiṣāfī (d. 1910). Al-Bannā’ admired Shaykh Ḥasanayn’s pious life and prodigious learning, but what impressed him most of all was the way in which Shaykh Ḥasanayn took seriously the duty to “command right and forbid wrong” and provide counsel to public figures, even when doing so put his life in danger. And while al-Bannā’ granted that it was possible for great Ṣūfīs, as friends of God (*awliyyā’*), to perform miracles, he believed that Shaykh Ḥasanayn’s greatest miracle was the effectiveness of his *daʿwa* (2011, 16-18).

Shaykh Ḥasanayn al-Ḥiṣāfī, an Egyptian al-Azhar graduate and scholar of the Shāfiʿī school (*madhhab*), began his Ṣūfī journey when he joined a branch of the Shādhiliyya order

---

\(^9\) In describing his dual interests in both Ṣūfism and ongoing national protests during his time in Damanhūr, he states that, “despite my immersion in both Ṣūfism (*ṭasawwuf*) and worship (*taʿābad*), I thought that, in national service, *jihād* is compulsory (*mafrūd*)…” (2011, 27).
while on *hajj* in Mecca in 1872 upon meeting the order’s shaykh and *murshid*, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Fāsī (d. 1872) (De Jong 1978, 107). The Shādhilī order was founded by Abū ‘l-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), a Maghrībi Śūfī who advocated strict adherence to the *sharīʿa* so as to purify the mirror of one’s soul in preparation for the mystical journey to God.\(^\text{10}\) Emphasizing the practical aspects of mysticism over and above the more metaphysically oriented mysticism of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), al-Shādhilī advocated a path of spiritual advancement which was just as available to socially engaged members of society as it was to dedicated ascetics. As a result, later orders which spread throughout North Africa as well as Syria, Turkey, and Indonesia were known for their robust observance of the *sharīʿa* and active social participation, encouraging self-restraint and sobriety rather than ostentatious demonstrations of piety (Knysh 2000, 207-10; 217; 221). In addition to the Shādhilī order, al-Ḥiṣāfī also adopted the way of the Tijāniyya, an order founded by Aḥmad al-Tijānī (d. 1815) which eventually made its way through Morocco, the Western Sahara, and the Sūdān. Al-Tijānī was born in Algeria, studied *ḥadīth* in Fez, and joined a number of Śūfī orders throughout Morocco, including the Shādhiliyya, before going on pilgrimage to Mecca in 1772. Upon his return to North Africa, he announced that he had received special dispensation from the Prophet Muḥammad to found a new order which stressed a mystical relationship with the Prophet (*ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*) rather than union with God. Moreover, he advocated a quiet *dhikr* and forbid his followers from visiting living saints or the tombs of dead ones (249). With its *ṭarīqa*-based movement aiming at

---

\(^{10}\) The following quote from one of al-Shādhilī’s disciples further captures the way in which al-Shādhilī believed that knowledge gained through Śūfī thought and practice should be governed by the fundamental scriptural sources of Islam: “If, says al-Shādhilī, your mystical unveiling (*kashf*) diverges from the Qur’an and the Sunna, hold fast to them and take no notice of your unveiling; tell yourself that the truth of the Qur’an and the Sunna is guaranteed by God Most High, which is not the case with unveiling, inspiration and mystical perceptions” (Knysh 2000, 207).
societal reform and renewal and its emphasis on hadīth literature, the Tijāniyya were part of a larger movement of “neo-Sufi” orders including the Sanūsiyya, Khatmiyya, and Naqshbandiyya, all of which emerged in the early modern and modern periods.11

Bringing together elements of the Shādhiliyya and Tijāniyya, Shaykh Ḥasanayn al-Ḥiṣāfī eventually founded his own order in Egypt after deciding to leave al-Fāsī’s order, the al-Makkiyya al-Fāsiyya, over a disagreement concerning the lawfulness of a particular style of dhikr. He was able to attain legal status for the order without it being subsumed under the aegis of the state as was required for other Şūfī orders. The process of centralizing the orders had begun in 1812 as part of a larger effort by Muḥammad ʿAlī aimed at consolidating the various institutions in Egypt within the machinery of the state. This eventually culminated in the 1895 establishment of a Şūfī Council (Majlis al-Şūfī) invested with jurisdiction over all orders in Egypt and headed by the chief shaykh of the Şūfī orders (shaykh mashāyikh al-ṭuruq al-ṣūfiyya).

---

11 The term “neo-Sufi” (or “neo-Sufism”) was first coined by Fazlur Rahman in order to describe those early modern and especially modern orders which possessed an “outward looking reformist orientation” as opposed to an “older quietist mystical tradition.” Typically, Şūfī orders which are deemed to fall under this taxon are said to exhibit the following three characteristics: 1) a mass organization hierarchically-structured under the authority of the founder and his family; 2) a renewed emphasis on the hadīth and the Prophet Muḥammad; and 3) a commitment to religious, social, and even political reform which might entail the use of armed force, especially in resistance to colonial occupiers (O’Fahey and Radtke 1993, 57). R.S. O’Fahey and Bernd Radtke have questioned the way in which this term has been used to designate a novel set of developments in Şūfism, as if these characteristics had not existed in previous orders. In particular, they question the claim that with their focus on union with or annihilation in the Prophet Muḥammad (fanāʿ fiʿl-rasūl), “neo-Sufi” orders represent a “modern revivalist” rejection of Ibn Ḥarībī en toto, especially his notion of the “unity of being” (wahdat al-wujūd). They argue that when supposed “neo-Sufis” such as ʿAlī Ibn Idrīs (d. 1837) speak about the ṭariqa Muḥammadiyya, this does not entail the rejection of Ibn Ḥarībī and his theological ontology but rather is best understood as a station on the way to annihilation in God (69-72). Valerie Hoffman (1999) has come to much the same conclusion. John Voll, however, has continued to argue for the viability of the term, pointing out that even O’Fahey and Radtke acknowledge the development of new organizational structures, and that moreover, their discussion favors the Idrīsī traditions to the exclusion of others such as those of Naqshbandī ʿAlī Sirhindī (d. 1624), who held a much more ambivalent view of Ibn Ḥarībī (2008, 321, 325). Interestingly, Voll also notes that among “neo-Sufi” orders during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there arose a newfound interest in the writings of al-Ghazālī, perhaps in order to combat the extremes of Wahhabī-style thought (327).
who was to be chosen from the al-Bakrī family, a prominent family appointed to the post by Muḥammad ʿAlī (De Jong 2000, 162). As a result of both being supervised by the state as well as depending on it as a primary source of funding, those Ṣūfī orders under its authority felt pressure not only to support it but also the British colonial administration which had come to wield much influence over the palace. Freed from the pressures of government oversight, Shaykh al-Ḥiṣāfī and his followers were able to speak out against foreign rule and pursue a socially active agenda of reform.  

Such a socially engaged Ṣūfism undoubtedly proved attractive to al-Bannā’, and so in 1923, he was finally initiated into the Ḥaṣāfiyya order by Shaykh Ḥasanayn’s son, Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Wāhhab (Al-Bannā’ 2011, 19). The Ḥaṣāfiyya order thus suited him well by enabling him to integrate his conviction regarding the importance of ethical formation (tarbīya) with his growing involvement with social and political activism. This constellation of interests came together most explicitly during this period when al-Bannā’ and fellow Ḥaṣāfī al-Sukkarī established the Ḥaṣāfī Charity Society (al-jamaʿiyyat al-khayriyya al-Ḥaṣāfiyya) with al-Bannā’

---

12 De Jong notes that the centralization of the Ṣūfī orders also had the effect of undermining the institutional framework which had long tethered Ṣūfīsm to the discursive religious sciences (ʿilm) such as law. This took institutional form perhaps most extensively in the center of Sunnī learning in Egypt and beyond, al-Azhar. De Jong writes, “[f]rom this time onward, the importance of ṭasawwuf as one of the disciplines taught at al-Azhar decreased. [Muḥammad ʿAlīʾs decision to centralize], it might be suggested, is the genesis of the transformation of al-Azhar into a stronghold of orthodoxy and a centre of opposition towards those propagating a mystical conception of Islam. Its proclamation widened the gap between ʿilm and ṭasawwuf and contributed to the ossification of Islamic mysticism in Egypt, since the opportunity for the head of a ṭariqa to obtain official sanction from al-Bakrī eliminated—at least partially—the need to prove himself a scholar” (1978, 23).

13 Tammy Elmansoury observes that Shaykh al-Ḥaṣāfī warned his followers to stay out of politics; however, he reminded them that commanding and forbidding is their duty. Al-Ḥaṣāfī performed this duty himself even in the presence of powerful political leaders. One time when he was invited to visit prime minister Riyāḍ Pāsha (d. 1911), he witnessed another scholar entering and bowing to Pāsha, at which time he struck the man in the face declaring, “[s]tand oh man, because rukūʿ [bowing in prayer] is only allowed before God, so do not disgrace the religion and knowledge, or God will disgrace you!” (2012, 86). For more on Shaykh Ḥasanayn and the Ḥaṣāfiyya, see Elmansoury (2012, 55-59, 81-91).
as secretary and al-Sukkarī as president. Al-Bannā’ described the organization as a cross between a Ṣūfī order and a modern voluntary association whose twofold aim was to engage in the *da’wa* of building ethical character (*akhlāq*) and oppose the proselytizing efforts of Christian missionaries, specifically the evangelical Bible mission which preached its faith under the guise of teaching embroidery and providing asylum to orphans. As stated in his *Memoirs*, al-Bannā’ came to view the Ḥaṣāfī Charity Society as a precursor to the Muslim Brotherhood (15).

After completing his training at the Primary Teachers’ Training School in Damanhūr in 1923, al-Bannā’ entered the Dar al-ʿUlūm in Cairo, a higher educational institution founded in 1873 as an attempt to combine the traditional religious sciences with the modern hard and social sciences. It essentially became a university level teacher training school and a pathway into government employment for the educated urban middle class, known as the *effendiyya* (Krämer 2010, 17-18). Al-Bannā’ arrived to a Cairo experiencing substantial social, political, and intellectual disruption and upheaval. As he put it, growing numbers of agricultural laborers (*fallāhīn*) moving to the city in search of work were greeted by bars, theaters, and dance halls. The two leading political parties, the Wafd and the Liberal Constitutionalists, engaged in rancorous debate which only further stoked the disunity plaguing the nation. And in the wake of the abolition of the caliphate in 1924 and the subsequent “Kemalist coup” in Turkey, secularism had engulfed Egypt and threatened the Muslim religion (2011, 48).

In Cairo, al-Bannā’ connected with his Ḥaṣāfī brethren, enjoying the continuity they provided with his life in Maḥmūdiyya and Damanhūr, and he also joined the group, Nobility of Islamic Character (*makārim al-akhlāq al-islāmīyya*), which organized lectures on Islamic subjects for personal betterment (2011, 44). Through his participation in this society, al-Bannā’ gained
access to and developed networks with the charitable and reformist organizations which increasingly emerged in Cairo during the 1920s, most notably the Young Men’s Muslim Association (YMMA) (jama’iyyat al-shubbān al-muslimīn).

One prominent elder in the leadership ranks of the YMMA was Muḥib al-Dīn al-Khatīb (d. 1969) who also directed the popular Salafiyya book store. He, along with other reformist luminaries such as Rashīd Riḍā and Farīd Wajdī, editor of the *Journal of Conquest* (Majallat al-fath), provided an intellectual firmament for al-Bannā’ best characterized as modern, reformist, and salafī in orientation (2011, 49).

He found more in common with these individuals than with the shaykhs at al-Azhar whom he visited and engaged in heated debate about the pressing dilemmas of the missionary and atheistic currents affecting Egyptian society. All too often, al-Bannā’ found that, in the halls of al-Azhar, his calls to action fell on deaf ears (2011, 50-51).

Due to his concern for the moral reform of Egyptian society, al-Bannā’ structured his studies in both Damanhūr and Cairo so as to maximize their practical application. During his time at the Primary Teachers’ Training School, he spent a great deal of time with al-Ghazālī’s *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Iḥyāʿ ʿulūm al-dīn) which he read with one of his teachers.

---

14 Commins writes that, “[t]he YMMA sought to revive Muslim society through a return to true Islam as it is found in the Qur’an. This meant adhering to Islamic morality, striving for Muslim solidarity, and assimilating modern science. To pursue this agenda, the YMMA established schools to teach the Qur’an and sponsored lectures on the Prophetic Traditions and Muhammad’s life. It called for the application of religious laws banning alcohol, gambling, and prostitution. The Association also opposed the spread of Western culture, particularly lax morals and missionaries’ criticisms of Islam. It favoured modest dress for women, supervision of public behaviour at summer resorts, and restrictions on the genders intermingling. As a long term goal, the YMMA wanted to restore the caliphate. These ideas would become part of the Muslim Brothers’ programme” (2008, 130-31).

15 Though an extremely well-known voice in the reformist circles in Cairo which al-Bannā’ frequented, Krämer notes the relatively minor presence of Riḍā in al-Bannā’’s *Memoirs*. She considers the possibility that Riḍā “either … was too busy and important for a young student, or al-Banna was aware of Rida’s hostility to ‘popular’ Sufism, which, for him, included the Shadhiliyya order in general and the ‘grave-worshippers’ (al-quburiyyin) in particular, of whom al-Banna was one” (2010, 23).
who was also a Ḥaṣafī. Al-Ghazālī provided guidance to al-Bannā’ as he explored a series of questions revolving around the degree to which knowledge should be viewed as intrinsically valuable and thus worthy of pursuit in all of its forms or as a more instrumental good primarily for the purpose of fulfilling one’s religious duties and earning a living (2011, 32). In light of the challenges faced by Egypt, al-Bannā’ leaned toward the latter view. Richard Mitchell observes that this understanding of knowledge in applied terms pervaded al-Bannā’’s early preaching to his first followers in the Society; moreover, “throughout his career, it sustained and reinforced what one might call the practical and at the same time other-worldly qualities of his mind” (1993, 3). One may also find this attitude represented in one of the course essays al-Bannā’ wrote in his final year at Dar al-ʿUlūm. In response to a prompt asking how students intended to realize their hopes following graduation, al-Bannā’ declared that the most praiseworthy individuals were those who helped and counseled to others. This was best achieved either through “genuine Şūfism” (al-ṭasawwuf al-ṣādiq) characterized by sincerity (ikhlāṣ) and action (ʿamal) or by means of teaching and counseling which is like Şūfism in its emphasis on sincerity and action but supersedes it in its involvement with people. Al-Bannā’ chose the path of teaching and counseling for, as he wrote, in light of the European materialist philosophies and traditions affecting Egypt, its people were in need of guidance (2011, 54).

---

16 Mitchell notes that elsewhere in the same essay, al-Bannā’ draws a distinction between an isolated spirituality (al-rühāniyya al-ʿitizāliyya) and a social spirituality (al-rühāniyya al-ijtamʿāiyya), the latter of which al-Bannā’ advocated. For believers, he wrote, while the performance of ritual and devotional practice was necessary in order to ascend the spiritual path, there was also an obligation to enter the world and exert “effort” (jihād) in addressing social ills (1993, 216). Scholar and Brotherhood member Muḥammad Zaḥī later appropriated the term “social spirituality” to describe the ethos undergirding the Society (1980, 53). As Mitchell notes, following al-Bannā’’s death, this conception was used by members of the Society to distinguish it from institutional Şūfism which most of them, as part of the effendiyya class, looked upon with suspicion. I will return to this notion when I discuss in more detail the role of Şūfism in the early Brotherhood and al-Bannā’’s thought.
Upon graduation from Dar al-ʿUlūm in 1927, al-Bannāʾ was assigned as an Arabic teacher to a primary school in Ismāʿīliyya in the Suez Canal Zone. Shortly after arriving, al-Bannāʾ introduced himself to and developed relationships with the local religious, social, and political notables. In addition to teaching classes during the day, at night he instructed the children’s parents who themselves were mostly laborers, small merchants, and civil servants. He also began to visit local coffeehouses in order to deliver brief religious sermons, and afterwards, he would take aside those who appeared most receptive to his message in order to continue instruction on a more personal basis. His message of personal and social renewal for the sake of the Egyptian nation found a receptive audience, for in the area of the Suez Canal Zone, one was confronted on a daily basis by the ubiquitous presence of British military camps and European business interests. British military personnel roamed widely, the Suez Canal Company dominated commercial activity, and the luxurious homes of foreign workers overlooked the dilapidated shanties of Egyptian laborers (2011, 69-70). According to al-Bannāʾ’s Memoirs, in March 1928, six men approached and formally petitioned him to lead them in an effort to reclaim the glory of Islam by promoting the religion in opposition to those domestic and foreign elements in Egyptian society which stood in its way.¹⁷ Al-Bannāʾ accepted their call and together they pledged to be “soldiers” (jund) for the daʿwa of Islam, referring to themselves as “brothers

¹⁷ As reported by al-Bannāʾ, the six men declared the following: “We know not the practical way to reach the glory of Islam and serve the welfare of Muslims. We tire of this life of humiliation and captivity. Behold, you see that Arabs and Muslims in this country have no status (manzila) or dignity (karāma). They are no more than mere vassals (tābaʿīn) belonging to these foreigners…. We are unable to perceive the road to action as you perceive it, or to know the path to the service of the homeland (watan), the religion (dīn), and the Muslim community (umma) as you know it. All that we desire now is to present you with all that we possess, to be acquitted by God of the responsibility, and for you to be responsible before Him for us and for what we must do” (2011, 70).
in the “service” (*khidma*) of Islam,” that is, the Muslim Brothers (*al-ikhwān al-muslimūn*) (2011, 70-71).\(^{18}\)

The early Brotherhood combined elements of a welfare organization and a *da’wa* society by delivering social services and providing an Islamic education based on ethical formation (*tarbīya*) and moral refinement (*tahdhīb*), often at a mosque or school they had built. All of this served the purpose of raising a new generation of Muslims who would understand Islam correctly and live it out faithfully. At first, al-Bannāʾ and his followers rented a room in a local Qur’ān school where the meetings of the Society were held. They also founded an evening school which they called the “School of Moral Refinement” (*madrasat al-tahdhīb*) where they implemented a curriculum of various Islamic subjects including Qur’ānic recitation and memorization, creeds, history, and biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions. These subjects were taught in a simplified manner with an eye towards practical application so that members might learn to implement in their lives the virtues of brotherhood, sacrifice, and selflessness. (Al-Bannāʾ 2011, 71). Much of this concern for ethical and spiritual formation held by al-Bannāʾ both stemmed from and was given shape by his background as a member of the

\(^{18}\) It should be noted that this account of the origins of the Brotherhood is contested by Aḥmad al-Sukkarī and his partisans. Al-Sukkarī and al-Bannāʾ, it should be recalled, together established the Ḥaṣāfī Charity Society which al-Bannāʾ acknowledged as a major precursor to the Brotherhood. Al-Sukkarī, however, claimed that the organization was not just a precursor to but rather the conceptual and institutional genesis of the Brotherhood. As Lia observes, the account given by al-Bannāʾ likely had to do with the 1947 struggle for leadership between he and al-Sukkarī. Lia writes that, “[a]l-Sukkari was the key personality in the 1947 crisis in the Society and there is little doubt that al-Banna’s memoirs were written to a large extent in response to the challenge posed by him. Al-Banna’s close contacts with the Hassafī Welfare Society, which was headed by al-Sukkari, strongly indicate that the idea of a new Islamic society must have been discussed. Furthermore, al-Sukkari also became the head of the local branch of the Muslim Brothers in al-Mahmudiyya. This branch appears to have been simply an extension of the Hassafī Welfare Society under the new name of the Muslim Brothers” (1998, 35). I quote this passage from Lia not only to shed light on the contested nature of the Brotherhood’s beginnings, but also in order to present further evidence of the Brotherhood’s Ṣūfī origins.
Ḥaṣāfī order. Though more will be said on this later, it is appropriate to note that other elements of Ṣūfism made their way into the early Brotherhood in the form of the oath (bayʿa) taken by members to obey al-Bannāʾ, weekly meetings that including the chanting of Ṣūfī hymns (anāshīd), and processions in which some of the paraphernalia of Ṣūfism was prominent (Lia 1998, 38).

After growing the Brotherhood in Ismāʿīliyya and expanding it to several towns throughout the Suez Canal Zone, al-Bannāʾ transferred in 1932 to a primary school in Cairo where he moved the Society’s headquarters (2011, 125). The time following al-Bannāʾ’s move to Cairo in 1932 until his death in 1949 is typically divided into two periods, the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War which witnessed the rise of the Society into a prominent national movement and then the years following the war wherein the political environment became increasingly toxic as the struggle for power among political parties, the palace, and the British devolved into outright violence and nearly brought about the collapse of parliamentary life and the rule of law (Mitchell 1993, 36). During the early 1930s, the Brotherhood focused on developing institutional organization and capacity and continuing to spread their message through educational daʿwa. The General Guidance Bureau (maktab al-irshad al-ʿām) and the Consultative Assembly (al-hayʿat al-tāʿsīsiyya) were created as the Society’s central deliberative and decision making bodies; moreover, they administered the Brotherhood’s other units which included, in descending order of size, “areas” (manātiq), “districts” (dawāʾir), and “branches” (shuʿab) (Lia 1993, 96, 99). It was also during this time that al-Bannāʾ and the Society leadership

19 Lia quotes Jamāl al-Bannāʾ, Ḥasan al-Bannāʾ’s younger brother, describing the early Brotherhood as an Islamic welfare society with, especially in its first years, “a strong touch of Sufism” (1998, 37).
began convening “general conferences” which sought to ratify statutes and address various subjects such as Christian missionary activity, doctrine and propaganda, and membership criteria and responsibilities.\textsuperscript{20} Out of these conferences also came the creation of a press responsible for publishing Brotherhood periodicals, most notably the Muslim Brotherhood daily newspaper (\textit{Jarīdat al-ikhwān al-muslimīn}), and the “messages” (\textit{rasā‘il}) penned by al-Bannā’, the latter of which soon became the most important indoctrination texts for the Society (Mitchell 1993, 13).

Gudrun Krämer observes that during the early to mid-1930s as the Brotherhood began to extend its reach throughout Egyptian society and centralize its organizational apparatus, “the Society of Muslim Brothers was gradually transformed from a benevolent society with pronounced Sufi elements to a social movement with the attributes of a mass political party, with certain elements of the cadre party superimposed” (2010, 36). This took the form first of open letters sent to political authorities in order to rebuke and/or provide guidance (\textit{naṣīḥa}), the most well-known one being a missive sent in 1936 to King Farūq (d. 1965) and the heads of all Arab governments which analyzed the challenges facing the Arab nations as well as Islamdom as a whole and prescribed a program of social, educational, political, and economic reform.\textsuperscript{21} Al-Bannā’’s desire to move the Brotherhood into public political life was made even more evident

\textsuperscript{20} Regarding the number of branches and attendance of the “general conferences” during the early to mid-1930s, Krämer writes, “[a]t the time of the First General Conference, held in June 1933, the Society reportedly had a total of fifteen branches: one in Cairo, five in the Suez Canal Zone and the remaining nine in the Delta. In the latter half of 1933, some twenty branches were opened, some of them quite small…. The Second General Conference in January 1934 was attended by seventy-six delegates from twenty-four branches; others were unable to send a delegate. By 1936, the total number of branches may have exceeded 100. In July 1936, the Society’s newspaper estimated the number of branches to be 150, which were still heavily concentrated in the Delta. At about the same time, British intelligence estimated the total number of members to be about 800, though the total number of adherents may well have exceeded several thousand” (2010, 45-46).

\textsuperscript{21} This letter was later published as the “message” (\textit{risāla}), “Towards the Light” (\textit{Naḥwa al-Nūr}). An English translation of it may be found in Euben and Zaman 2009.
in his 1934 “message” (risāla), entitled “To What Do We Summon Humankind” (“Ilā ay shay’ nadʿū al-nās”), in which he declared,

“We summon you to Islam, the teachings of Islam, the laws of Islam, and the guidance of Islam, and if this smacks of “politics” in your eyes, then it is our “policy”! And if the one summoning you to these principles is a “politician,” then we are the most respectable men, God be praised, in “politics”!” (1965, 131; 1978, 75)

The Society did not officially express its intentions to engage political issues and enter the political realm until their fifth “general conference” in 1938-39 where it was pronounced that the “Islamic system” (al-nizam al-Islāmī), as “the final arbiter of life in all its categories,” held direct implications for one’s approach to the constitution, government, law, nationalism, and Arabism (Mitchell 1993, 14).

In Egypt, as in many countries throughout Europe and the Middle East, the 1930s witnessed the spread of youth organizations, some of which were paramilitary groups attached to political parties and others which followed the “boy scout” model. What all of these groups shared was an emphasis on physical exercise, personal hygiene, and spirituality that entailed the discipline of the body, mind, and soul (Krämer 2010, 54). In Europe and North America, one found examples of such organizations in the Boy Scouts of America and the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), both of which espoused a kind of “muscular Christianity.” Following in the wake of these groups as well as the YMMA, al-Bannā’ created the Rovers (jawwāla) and later the Battalions (katāʾib). The program for both groups included both indoctrination which drew heavily from the discourses of jihād and chivalrous masculinity (futūwwa) as well as physical training and Ṣūfī practices of self-discipline in the forms of dhikr and all-night prayer recitations (māʾthūrāt) (Lia 1998, 174). With these methods, al-Bannā’ fashioned an ethos which stressed action and one’s religious duty to repel aggression against the
Muslim community. Though the Rovers and Battalions did not engage in paramilitary activities, they did provide the recruits for what was later founded in 1940 as the Brotherhood’s military wing, the “Special Apparatus” (*al-jihāz al-sirri*).22

Following the Second World War, instability and discord came to increasingly characterize political life as civil society groups, political parties, and the palace vied with the British and one another for the determination of Egypt’s future. Consequently, political factions resorted to violence with greater frequency in order to achieve their objectives.23 As Mitchell observes, “these years can be seen as the beginning of the final phase of the breakdown of parliamentary life and the rule of law in Egypt, which culminated in the revolution of 1952” (1993, 59). By this time, Brotherhood ranks had grown to 500,000 active members, and as such it came to be considered among the largest and most influential public actors in Egypt, rivalling even the Wafāḍ party which had been for some time the country’s most prominent political party (328). Al-Bannā’ had long emphasized the importance of the preparatory stage of formation

22 Commenting on the ubiquity of paramilitary groups in Egypt during the 1920s and 19230s, Lia states that, “[s]ince the British colonial power crushed the Urabi revolt in 1881, a number of ‘terrorist groups’ had emerged in Egypt. In the 1920s the Wafāḍ Party and the Nationalist Party (*al-Hizb al-Watani*) had their own secret military wings which aimed to weaken British imperialism through ‘terrorist’ attacks and assassinations. The murder of Sir Lee Stack, the British High Commander of Sudan, in 1924 by the Wafāḍ military wing was the most notable of these attacks. In the 1930s, however, these parties became increasingly associated with the older generation’s tacit acceptance of British colonial domination. Radical youth then began to look for other alternatives and flocked to the Muslim Brothers and the Young Egypt Party, as they were perceived as being more rigorously opposed to imperialism” (1998, 177).

23 While this readiness by political groups to use violence stemmed primarily from dynamics unique to the Egyptian context, the conflict in Palestine also likely contributed to this development. By the end of the Second World War, the crisis in Palestine had reached a tipping point. The presence of Zionist groups in a predominantly Arab Palestine governed by British colonial administrators proved to be a volatile combination, and as violence there escalated, calls rang throughout the Arab world to come to the aid of their suffering brothers and sisters in the faith. In 1947, al-Bannā’ ordered the Brotherhood, including the “Special Apparatus,” to prepare for *jihād* against their Zionist enemies in Palestine. After being trained by government sanctioned military officers, some of whom would go on to carry out the Free Officers *coup d’état* in 1952, Brotherhood members participated in a number of actions, though they were fairly limited in number and size (Mitchell 1993, 55-58).
(takwīn) which concerned itself with group organization and ethical and spiritual development (tarbīya), but with this newly acquired notoriety, there were growing calls among the membership to move to the next and final stage of execution (tanfidh) (Lia 1998, 178). While al-Bannā’ continued to counsel patience in the face of the trial (miḥna) being endured by the Brotherhood, the “Secret Apparatus” began performing a number of operations. Beginning in 1945, bombings and assassinations were carried out against the British and those Egyptian political leaders perceived as sympathetic to them, the most significant one being the 1948 assassination of prime minister Maḥmūd Fahmī al-Nuqrāshī (Krämer 2010, 75-80).

The increasing activity of the “Special Apparatus” coincided with an internal schism in 1947 which led al-Bannā’ to expel his long-time friend and now deputy, al-Sukkarī, who had challenged al-Bannā’ as a result of what he took to be his increasing authoritarian tendencies (Mitchell 1993, 53). Indicating the growing prominence of the “Secret Apparatus,” al-Bannā’ selected its acting head, Saliḥ al-ʿAshmawī, as his new deputy. The newfound influence and autonomy wielded by the Brotherhood’s clandestine military wing along with the Society’s overall expansion and weakened centralized control make it difficult to determine al-Bannā’’s precise knowledge of and control over the “Secret Apparatus.” This point is further corroborated by al-Bannā’’s responses to both the assassination of prime minister al-Nuqrāshī and what has come to be known as “the jeep affair.” In 1948, a jeep loaded with arms, explosives, and confidential papers came to the attention of patrolling Cairo policemen who arrested its occupants, leading to the full disclosure of the “Secret Apparatus.” Following this incident, the Society was dissolved and banned by the Egyptian government which had come to view it as a revolutionary movement intent on executing a coup d’état. Shortly thereafter, a Brotherhood member shot al-Nuqrāshī while another attempted to bomb the building holding evidence related
to the “jeep affair.” In the wake of these events, al-Bannāʼ condemned those responsible for the violence, declaring that they “are neither Brothers, nor are they Muslims” (68). His public rebukes and attempts at conciliation, however, were to no avail, and in February 1949, al-Bannāʼ was shot dead outside of the Cairo YMMA headquarters after having been mysteriously summoned there, likely by members of the Egyptian secret police (71). Though it is difficult to confirm due to the dearth of knowledge we have of al-Bannāʼʼs relationship to the “Secret Apparatus,” it seems as if his control over those Brotherhood elements which increasingly turned to political violence had substantially weakened.24

To be sure, al-Bannāʼʼs rhetoric included references to jihād in what might be characterized as revolutionary terms, a subject to which we will return below; however, the overall thrust of his thought resided in the conviction that education, more so than any other means, was the most effective strategy in achieving true long-term societal transformation. As Mitchell notes, for al-Bannāʼ, “[o]nce the individual regains his spiritual balance, then the effect of his reform will find its way into his family and thence to the nation at large. The nation will continue to suffer so long as its individuals lack the qualities necessary to make it great” (1993, 234).25 In this way, al-Bannāʼ and the Brotherhood stood in the reformist tradition of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897), ʿAbduh, and Riḍā which placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance on fostering a new mentality within the Muslim community through educational reform.26 Al-Bannāʼ was thus fond of citing Q. 13:11a which declares, “Indeed, God will not

24 For more on this, see Mitchell (1993, 54-55, 64-68, 73), Lia (1998, 177-81), and Krämer (2010, 70-75).
25 Commenting on this distillation of al-Bannāʼʼs thought, Mitchell writes that, “[i]f any single idea could be said to have been a keystone in Banna’s ‘system’ it was this one; it was so regarded by the membership” (1993, 234).
26 This point is further substantiated by reading lists distributed to Brotherhood teachers which, in the Qurʾānic reading section, included ʿAbduh and Riḍāʼs Tafsīr al-Manār, while ʿAbduhʼs Risalat al-
change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.” In effecting societal change through an educational daʿwa, al-Bannāʾ and the Brotherhood sought to create an “Islamic order” (al-niẓām al-Islāmī) based on those legal (i.e. shariʿa) principles which were distilled from the Qurʾān, Sunna, and the examples of the pious forbearers (al-salaf al-sāliḥ) (234-35).

However, although al-Bannāʾ was an educator, he was not a member of the educated class of jurists (ʿulamāʾ), nor was he a systematic thinker, or at least he was not greatly concerned with elaborating in any detail the theoretical underpinnings of his pedagogical program. Rather, his interests, intellectual and otherwise, were practical in nature. As such, he never composed a treatise, but instead wrote speeches, lectures, sermons, “fatwas,” open letters and newspaper articles for the purposes of persuading and/or guiding specific audiences, sometimes Brotherhood members and other times the general public. Krämer observes that the journalistic style employed by al-Bannāʾ placed him in the tradition of modern Arab reform.

---

Tawḥīd was featured prominently among the treatises in the general studies of faith section (along with works by al-Ghazālī) (Mitchell 1993, 323).

Mitchell makes an interesting observation about the Society’s conception of an “Islamic order” when he writes that, “[t]he distinction between an ‘Islamic order and a ‘Muslim state’ in a medieval sense is a fundamental one and distinguishes our analysis of the Society from most others, which view it as a reactionary movement fanatically dedicated to re-creating a seventh-century political order. Apart from the question of revolutionary intent, such a view does not explain its relative indifference … to such issues as the caliphate. It makes impossible an analysis of the complexity of motives which prompted membership. Quite apart from the secularist and nationalist members, few even of the ‘traditional’ Brothers, let alone those who had entered in varying degrees the ‘modern’ world, would have considered this a possible goal if even a desirable one. We take essentially at face value the view attributed to Banna and expressed by Hudaybi, and in writings by members of the Society, that the existing constitutional parliamentary framework in Egypt, if reformed, would satisfy the political requirements of Islam for a ‘Muslim state.’” In a footnote to the previous quote, Mitchell further elucidates his distinction between a “Muslim state” and an “Islamic order” by stating that while for former strives for a “religious government,” the latter rather seeks “a government inspired by religion” (1993, 235). Although al-Bannāʾ seemed to accept Egypt’s constitutional parliamentary political order, there was an ambivalence to his political thought for he also condemned the multiparty system which, he argued, only exacerbated the factionalism which had made Egypt so weak. Rather, all parties should be dissolved and replaced with a single party to unify the nation (308).
movements which relied on newspapers and other periodicals as platforms from which to reach, educate, and move their audiences to action (2010, 84). This proclivity for the practical also stemmed from his deep commitment to and involvement with the Ḥaṣāfī Ṣūfī order which emphasized the applied religious sciences as well as the experiential, as opposed to discursive, knowledge of God and the world (Mitchell 1993, 326). Shaykh al-Ḥiṣāfī discouraged his followers from discussing those esoteric aspects of the religious sciences which only encouraged debate and infighting, and likewise al-Bannā’ condemned dwelling on those aspects of law or theology which had no practical value. This conviction resulted from al-Bannā’’s deep concern for the discord he witnessed plaguing the Muslim community, and it led him to cite a preference for “speculative philosophies” (falsafāt al-naẓriyya) over the “practical sciences” (al-ʿulūm al-ʿalamiyya) as a significant reason for the weakening of the umma (1965, 210; 1978, 19-20). In light of the above insights, Ibrahim Abu-Rabi’ describes al-Bannā’ in Gramscian terms as an “organic intellectual” whose thought was intimately tied to the existential and material needs of the lower and emerging middle classes he sought to represent (1996, 86).

Like al-Afghānī and ‘Abduh, al-Bannā’ believed that Muslim weakness and vulnerability to European domination resulted from the community of believers straying from the path of “true Islam.” In “Between Yesterday and Today” (“Bayna al-āms wa al-yawm”), al-Bannā’ lays out the internal developments which led to corruption and disunity among the Muslim community, thus rendering it susceptible to external threats, most recently in the form of European Christian missions and colonialism. In the first generations of Muslims (salaf) and early caliphates leading up to the ‘Abbāsids, there existed both religious devotion and political unity which transformed the umma into a powerful force, expanding and establishing its dominance throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe (1965, 207-08; 1978, 17-18). Eventually, partisanship, sectarianism, rulers’
indulgence in luxury, the transfer of power to non-Arabs such as the Persians and Turks who never absorbed “genuine Islam,” indifference to the applied and natural sciences, and blind obedience to authority created the conditions which made Muslims liable to Mongol invasion and the Crusades. Although there were subsequent periods of revival involving great leaders such as Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and formidable regimes like the Ottoman Empire, the Muslim community was not able to match the pace of European advancements in science and commerce. Consequently, as the Europeans began to expand and establish colonial outposts and administrations throughout Africa and Asia, Muslim polities were in no condition to resist, a process which finally culminated in the total defeat of the Ottomans during the First World War. And while European military and commercial superiority had led to material domination of the lands of Islam, the cultural corruption and mental colonization of Muslims who adopted European norms and dress and practiced licentious lifestyles were perhaps most insidious of all (1965, 208-14, 220-21; 1978, 18-22, 27-28).28

In order to turn back the tide against the social and moral decay pervading Egyptian society, an ethico-spiritual elite was required to lead the way in transforming the hearts and minds of those who had succumbed to the corruption. For such transformation to begin, this

28 In response to claims that al-Bannā’ and the Brotherhood were stridently anti-Western, Lia writes, “[T]rue, there was a strong ambiguity, and, at times, an outright hostility among the Muslim Brothers towards Western civilization because the West was conceived of as encroaching upon and assaulting the Islamic world from outside and within, not only by sheer military, economic and political dominance but also by undermining its cultural traditions and religion. Nevertheless, the conclusion that the Society’s ideology represented an overall rejection of all aspects of Western civilization is unfounded. The frequent anti-Western outbursts must be seen as a part of the Brothers’ struggle to fight what they saw as excessive and unqualified fascination with all aspects of Western culture among their fellow Muslims, resulting in an ingrained inferiority complex (‘uqdat al-khawaja) with regard to their own culture and traditions” (1993, 77).
vanguard had as its task the awakening of the dormant masses from their spiritual and moral lethargy. In “Our Mission” (“Da’watunā”), al-Bannā’ observes,

The difference between us and our people, though we are all in accord in our faith in [Islam], is that among them it is an anesthetized faith, dormant within their souls, one to which they do not wish to submit and according to whose dictates they do not wish to act; whereas it is a burning, blazing, intense faith fully awakened in the souls of the Muslim Brothers. (1978, 44)

By performing an educational da’wa, al-Bannā’ and the Brotherhood sought to convert Muslims to the “true Islam” and effect a moral regeneration which would begin at the individual level and then encompass the family and eventually wider society, thus paving the way for the transformation of the state. This focus on education and ethical and spiritual formation (tarbīya) occupied the greater part of al-Bannā’’s three-stage vision for the movement as laid out in his “Letter of Instruction” (Risalāt al-ta’ālīm), constituting the first two stages of “acquaintance” (ta’rīf) and “formation” (takwīn). However, the third and final stage of “execution” (tanfīdh) was a time of jihād which al-Bannā’ defined as “uninterrupted labor to the reach the goal” of creating an Islamic order (1965, 10-15). To be sure, as noted by scholars such as Mitchell (1993, 207-08), Lia (1998, 83-84), and Krämer (2010, 100-04), al-Bannā’’s use of jihād was multivalent. Following in line with the concept’s wide register within the Islamic tradition, al-Bannā’ as well as other Brotherhood members invoked jihād to connote the struggle to purify oneself and society at large of its base desires, profligate behaviors, and unjust structures.

However, al-Bannā’ also spoke of jihād in terms of waging war against the enemies of Islam. In his “Letter on Jihād” (Risalāt al-jihād), al-Bannā’ presents the doctrine of jihād as it was conceived in classical Islamic law wherein as a means to spread the call of Islam, it was a collective duty (farḍ kifaya), and in the eventuality of an attack by nonbelievers, it then became an individual duty (farḍ ‘ayn). Referring to the condition of the Muslim community in his day,
al-Bannāʾ states that, not only have Muslim lands “been trampled on, and their honor besmirched,” but “[t]heir adversaries are in charge of their affairs, and the rites of their religion have fallen into abeyance within their own domains…” Consequently, declares al-Bannāʾ, “it has become an individual obligation … on every Muslim … to get ready for [jihād] until the time is ripe for it…” (1965, 53; 1978, 150). In his discussion of the evolution of the concept of jihād in al-Bannāʾ’s thought, Ran Levy identifies the Arab revolt in Palestine (1936-39) as perhaps the most decisive factor in moving al-Bannāʾ’s rhetoric in a more militant direction (2014, 150-51).

When discussing jihād prior to this period as he did in “Our Mission” (“Daʿwatunā”) published in 1935, al-Bannāʾ emphasized daʿwa as the Brotherhood’s central duty, calling on all members to make every effort (jihād) to place their souls on the right path and likewise guide others in doing so. While he does speak occasionally of jihād as armed struggle against the unbelieving occupiers, this is not the primary focus. That however began to change in the late 1930s (156). As the conflict between Palestinians and Zionists intensified, al-Bannāʾ called on all believers to come to the aid of their coreligionists, and he and the Society’s leadership began preparing the “battalions” and “Secret Apparatus” to carry out operations in Palestine. In the wake of this, al-Bannāʾ wrote his “Letter on Jihād” wherein “fighting/combat” (qitāl) was now the primary mode in which he discussed the duty, and “martyrdom” (istishhād) and the “art of death” (ṣināʿat al-mawt) were praised as that which guaranteed the nation (umma) “an exalted life in this world and eternal felicity in the next” (1965, 60; 1978, 156).

It is no surprise that al-Bannāʾ’s treatment of jihād in increasingly aggressive terms in the late 1930s and into the 1940s, coupled with his counsels of patience to Brotherhood members, led to confusion among those trying to ascertain his motives and aims. Krämer too observes this when she writes that, “…al-Banna’s militant rhetoric was frequently at odds with his cautious
policies, and his ultimate intentions were difficult to discern, for his followers as much as for outside observers, scholars included” (2010, 103-04). Much of this lack of clarity stemmed from al-Bannāʾ’s continued emphasis on the preparatory stage of “formation” (takwīn) in the context of his escalating rhetoric regarding jihād. Only when this stage and its focus on ethical and spiritual formation (tarbīya) had received the proper attention, he maintained, would movement to the “execution” (tanfīdh) stage be possible. However, entering this final stage required propitious timing which al-Bannāʾ identified as the moment when social pressures had reached such a boiling point that the Egyptian people cried out for revolution. At such a moment, al-Bannāʾ warned government leaders, the Brotherhood would have no choice but to confront and overthrow the enemies of Islam, whether foreign unbelievers occupying Muslim territory or Muslim political leaders refusing to use their power to achieve national liberation (Commins quoting al-Bannāʾ 2008, 149).

The Vanguard, the Nation, and “Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong”

To be sure, the discourse of jihād plays a prominent role in al-Bannāʾ’s thought, something to which a number of already discussed studies have brought attention; however, there has been little written on al-Bannāʾ’s understanding and deployment of the discourse on “commanding right and forbidding wrong.”29 While, in contrast to al-Ghazālī’s exhaustive account of the duty, al-Bannāʾ never provided a comparable analysis of the requirements,

29 For example, in Cook’s comprehensive study on “commanding right and forbidding wrong” in Islamic thought, he alludes to only one passage in Mitchell (1993, 18) which briefly describes an occasion when one of the Brotherhood members confronted al-Bannāʾ, citing the “three modes tradition” with its praise for performing the duty by hand as justification for more direct action to be taken in achieving the Society’s objectives. As I discuss at greater length below, al-Bannāʾ demurred and instead called on Brotherhood members to enjoin and forbid by way of “good admonition” (2000, 523). While it is true that al-Bannāʾ never provided a comprehensive treatment of the duty, he did appropriate elements of its discourse in order to conceptualize various facets of the Brotherhood movement.
conditions, and procedure for its performance, it nonetheless played an important role in his thought. In those accounts of the duty more characteristic of classical treatments in their reliance on the “three modes” tradition, we find that al-Bannā’ departs from al-Ghazālī in another way; namely, in his reticence to grant Brotherhood members permission to command and forbid by “the hand.” While such a position might seem unexpected considering al-Bannā’’s activist vision of Islam, I discuss a number of reasons below why, in light of his views on ethical formation as well as his concern for Muslim unity, his hesitation makes sense. It is true that one finds echoes of the classical discourse in some of al-Bannā’’s treatments of the duty; however, he more extensively appropriated the vocabulary of commanding and forbidding, especially from Qur’ānic passages such as Q. 3:110, in order to conceptualize the Brotherhood as a vanguard tasked with the moral and spiritual regeneration of the Muslim community in Egypt and the wider umma. Moreover, he relied on this discourse as a means to both critically engage the secular nationalisms of his day as well as to present an “Islamic nationalism” which was superior. As nationalist parties and discourses grew increasingly popular and pervasive in Egypt throughout the late 1930s, al-Bannā’ recognized that in order for the Brotherhood to continue its expansion and rise in public prominence, especially among the emerging middle class, it was crucial that he find a way to exploit and harness nationalist fervor. The discourse of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” enabled him to do just that.

In “Between Yesterday and Today” (“Bayna al-āms wa al-yawm”), al-Bannā’ delineates the fundamental pillars of the “Qur’ānic order” (al-nizām al-Qur’ānī) undergirding the Brotherhood movement such as prayer (ṣalāt), dhikr, repentance (tawba), fasting (ṣawm), zakāt, alms-giving (ṣadaqa), pilgrimage (ḥajj), jihād, and virtuous ethics (al-akhlāq al-fāḍila). He also includes the giving of sound advice (naṣīḥa), commanding right (amr bil-ma’rūf), and forbidding
wrong (nahy ‘an al-munkar) (1965, 205-06; 1978, 16). In the discourse surrounding these final three pillars, al-Bannā’ found a vocabulary which served to conceptualize the social practice of holding other believers accountable to the ethical standards of Islam, and as such, they were crucial for social solidarity and well-being. As al-Bannā’ observes, in many ways the initial rise of the Muslim nation (umma) may be attributed to its assiduous attention to the duty of enjoining and forbidding, as is confirmed in Q. 3:110a which declares, “You are the best nation (khayra ummatun) brought forth from humankind, commanding right and forbidding wrong (taʾmurūna biʾl-maʿrūf wa-tanhawna ‘ani al-munkar) and believing in God…” (1980, 41). In support of this, al-Bannā’ recalls when a Brotherhood member in Ismāʾiliyya attended a party where wine was being served. Upon discovering the presence of the illicit substance, he rebuked the hosts and told them that such activity contravened the commands of God; moreover, it was incumbent on Muslims to confront all such wrong doings they witnessed, a duty which was in accordance with the prophetic hadīth stating, “Religion is the giving of sound advice” (al-dīn al-naṣīḥa) (41).

In light of the importance of commanding and forbidding, al-Bannā’ used the occasion of the Fifth General Conference (al-muʿtamar al-khāmis) in 1938 to call on Brotherhood members to set aside a day each month on which to go into the community in order to give advice (naṣīḥa) and “command right and forbid wrong” (al-amr biʾl-maʿrūf waʾl-nahy ‘an al-munkar). Al-Bannā’ also counseled that the performance of these duties should be carried out with kindness (rifq) and forbearance (hawāda) and, if possible, in the privacy of their neighbors’ homes (2011, 238). In terms of the proper manner in which one should enjoin and forbid, al-Bannā’ adopted the classical “three modes” tradition wherein the duty is carried out (in ascending order of praiseworthiness) by the heart (qalb), tongue (lisān), or hand (yad). Somewhat surprisingly, however, al-Bannā’ diverges from al-Ghazālī’s more populist approach and apportions the labor
in a way more reminiscent of the Ḥanafīs. That is, while al-Ghazālī extended the right to command and/or forbid by heart, tongue, or hand to any Muslim who was legally competent and in possession of the ability to perform the duty, al-Bannā` restricted Brotherhood members to just the heart and tongue. He states that because commanding and forbidding by hand (bil yad) could be extremely difficult to carry out properly, it was best left to the “capable authority” (al-ḥākim al-qādir). As al-Bannā` notes, in such situations, it is expected only that the occasions and conditions of the wrong doings be reported to the proper authorities, unless urgent action is required (1980, 42).

At first glance, such a position may appear counterintuitive considering al-Bannā`’s embrace of an activist conception of Islam as a force for religious, social, and even political reform. However, as will be discussed more fully below, al-Bannā` placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of the stage of formation (takwīn) because of his recognition that the success of any movement primarily depended on its attention to spiritual and ethical formation (tarbīya). In many ways this stemmed from al-Bannā`’s experience with the Ḥaṣāfī Ṣūfī order, and it led him to clash with those elements of the Brotherhood which were impatient for direct action. Mitchell relays an anecdote where, in the late 1930s following the Society’s institutionalization of the Rover and battalion systems and its rise to public prominence, a group of Brotherhood members confronted al-Bannā` and called for more decisive action in establishing an “Islamic order.” In the course of doing so, they appealed to the prophetic hadīth used in the “three modes” tradition which exhorts, “[w]hoever sees a wrong and is able to put it right with his hand, let him do so; if he cannot, then with his tongue; if he cannot, then with his heart, which is the bare minimum of faith.” Rejecting this attempt by members to justify the use of force (i.e. recourse to the “hand”) as a legitimate means for achieving the Brotherhood’s goals,
al-Bannāʾ cited Q. 16:125 which declares, “[i]nvite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and reason with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of those who go aright” (1993, 18).

The reticence to resort to force on display here by al-Bannāʾ likely resulted from a number of factors, including his accommodationist proclivities and concern for maintaining Muslim unity; however, a further reason for his hesitation may be attributed to his awareness of the crucial importance of tarbīya, a topic to which a great deal of the Fifth General Conference (1938-39) was devoted as internal calls for political engagement and decisive action were increasingly made. In response, al-Bannāʾ sought to convince Brotherhood members that success could only follow patience and planning, for the path was long and difficult, yet there was no other way (Mitchell 1993, 15).

While one may find discussions of commanding and forbidding in al-Bannāʾ’s corpus which are more classical in their notion of the duty as an individual right and responsibility, the Brotherhood was more thoroughly shaped by those modern iterations of the discourse concerned with conceptualizing an organized movement or vanguard from within a Muslim imaginary. Thus, al-Bannāʾ declared that, “[i]t is our duty as the Muslim Brothers to work for the reform of individuals, hearts, and spirits which is possible only with God, and then to implement this in

---

30 Interestingly, Cook notes that Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) held very much the same reticence when it came to performing the duty by hand, though for him this had more to do with the fact that commanding and forbidding were to take place only in truly Muslim societies. For Quṭb, a “Muslim society is indeed one that enables a Muslim to devote himself to forbidding wrong, without his attempts being reduced to pointless gestures or made impossible altogether as is the case in the Jāhilī societies that exist today. The real task is thus to establish the good society as such, and this comes before the righting of small-scale, personal and individual wrongs … by way of forbidding wrong; such efforts are vain when the whole society is corrupt. All the sacred texts bearing on forbidding wrong … concern themselves with the duty of the Muslim in a Muslim society” (Cook paraphrasing Quṭb’s Qur’ānic exegesis (tafsīr) of Q. 3:104 and Q. 5:79 from his In the Shade of the Qurʾān (Fī zilāl al-Qurʾān) 2000, 528).
society until we become a worthy group (al-jamāʿa al-ṣāliha) which commands right and forbids wrong (taʾmur biʾl-maʿrūf wa-tanhaw ʿan al-munkar)…” (1980, 62-63). In “commanding right and forbidding wrong,” along with praying, giving zakāt, and obeying God, the Brotherhood would come to play the role of guardians (awliyya’) over their fellow believers (Al-Bannā’ citing Q. 9:71 1980, 39). Such a role for the Society was required just as it had been for the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions. In “Our Mission in a New Stage” (“Daʾwatuna fi ʿawr jadīd”), al-Bannā’ states that just as the “pious forbearers” (al-salaf al-ṣalih) combatted the forces of darkness and ignorance threatening their mission to bring God’s message to the world, so too were Brotherhood members called to do the same. As “people of the truth” (ahl al-haqq) and bearers of “the message of light” (risālat al-nūr), it was their duty to play the role of “teachers of humankind” (asātidhat al-nās) to those who were disoriented by the corrupting darkness which marred so many modern Muslim societies. Serving in this capacity, al-Bannā’ avowed, the Brotherhood exemplified Q. 3:110a which affirms, “You are the best nation (khayra ummatun) brought forth from humankind, commanding right and forbidding wrong (taʾmurūna biʾl-maʿrūf wa-tanhawna ʿan al-munkar) …” (1965, 76). This verse is also cited in al-Bannā’’s address “To the Youth” (“Ilā al-shabāb”) given at the Fifth General Conference (1938-39) wherein the Society’s student-aged members are called upon to serve their country. In the context of this exhortation, al-Bannā’ references Q. 3:110, asserting that the Brotherhood are the vanguard (ṣadāra) who must guide a confused humanity (al-insāniyya al-ḥā’ira) on the straight path (sawāʾ al-ṣabīl) (1977, 46-48).

Much of the Brotherhood’s identity created by al-Bannā’ stemmed from the belief that the Society was composed of an ethico-spiritual elite who had been set apart for the crucial task of renewing the Egyptian nation as well as the broader Muslim community. As is evident from
the above, he followed ʿAbduh and Riḍā in appropriating the discourse of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” to fashion the Brotherhood’s ethos into one of a vanguard bringing enlightenment to the slumbering masses. While al-Bannāʿ parsed Q. 3:110 to refer to a committed few set apart to effect religious, social, and political reform, elsewhere in his writings he employed it and other related verses in his attempts to construct an “Islamic nationalism” which conceived commanding and forbidding among the nations of the world as a patriotic duty incumbent on Egyptian Muslims. As Andrea Mura observes, beginning in the late 1930s and continuing into the 1940s, al-Bannāʿ’s intellectual energies were increasingly directed toward developing the idea of an Islamic government, to the point of nearly superseding his earlier emphasis on societal transformation from below (2012, 78). Recognizing the growing prominence of nationalist discourses among Egyptian independence movements seeking to throw off the yoke British occupation, al-Bannāʿ adopted and Islamized the modern Western categories of “homeland” (waṭan) and “nationalism” (qawmiyya). Doing so not only provided al-Bannāʿ with a powerful vehicle for anti-imperialistic propaganda, but it also enabled him to put forward a discursive vocabulary which effectively competed with a range of political parties and institutional actors by pulling from both modern secular and traditional religious registers (74).³¹ This proved especially efficacious as secular Arab nationalism was giving way to pan-Arab and pan-Islamic nationalistic sentiments (Lia 1998, 80).

³¹ Referring to the Brotherhood’s broader strategy in appealing to the Egyptian public, Lia states that, “[the Society’s] ideology served in many ways as a bridge between the traditional and modernist camps by its insistence on Islam as its only ideological tenet, but incorporating at the same time many aspects of modern ideologies and thinking. A main focus for the Muslim Brothers was how societal development could be based on Islam, reflecting very much an ‘applied Islam’ as opposed to the religious scripturalism of Islamic officialdom. This ability to relate religion to mundane political and economic problems undoubtedly accounted for the Society’s appeal among a younger generation raised in a traditional religious environment, but at the same time disenchanted by the conservatism and seclusion of the religious elite” (1998, 74).
We find the notion of an “Islamic nationalism” most extensively discussed by al-Bannāʿ in his “Towards the Light” (“Nahwa al-nūr”) which he published in 1936 as a message addressed to King Farūq, his prime minister Muṣṭafā al-Naḥās Pāsha, and the heads of all Arab governments. Seeking political reform in the name of Islam, al-Bannāʿ, among other things, advocates an approach to nationalism which is Islamic in orientation by highlighting its moral, as opposed to material or militaristic, objective of enhancing the global common good by “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” Al-Bannāʿ addressed this subject in a section entitled “Islam and National Greatness” (al-Islām wa al-ʿizza al-qawmiyya) which begins by first bringing attention to the ways in which the peoples of the world offer up their blood and lives for their nation’s welfare and glory. As it turns out, the kind of nationalist sentiment found in such acts of devotion received its truest form only within Islam. This was so because the Muslim community’s honor and virtue had been sanctified by God who declared, “[y]ou are the best nation (khayra ummatun) which has been brought forth for humankind…” (Q. 3:110a) (1965, 171). The umma’s moral excellence attested to in this verse manifested itself most explicitly in the ends towards which its nationalist energies were put. In contrast to European nations such as Britain, Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union which embraced nationalist ideologies based on “national chauvinism” (al-ʿašabiyya al-jinsiyya), “false pride” (al-fakhr al-kādhab), and “pure militarism” (al-ʿaskarī al-baḥt), an Islamic nationalism defined its goal in moral terms. That is, while Western nationalisms sought material wealth and public prestige only for self-aggrandizement, Muslim nations endeavored to secure the welfare of the world. This was confirmed, al-Bannāʿ observed, by God’s pronouncement that, “[y]ou command the good and forbid the evil, and believe in God” (Q. 3:110b). Therefore, it was in the performance of this duty that Muslim nations carried out their “civilizational missions” and fulfilled their national
By commanding and forbidding, Muslims nations would serve as international moral exemplars of justice and mercy, a stark contrast to those Western nations whose domineering ways only encouraged internecine warfare and aggression against weak nations (172, 176).

Şūfism, Tarbiya, and the Importance of the Stage of Formation (takwīn)

By appropriating the discourse of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” to conceptualize nationalism in such moralistic terms, al-Bannā’ was able to frame it from within a Muslim imaginary which enabled him to synthesize elements of modern European and Islamic reformist discourses in such a way as to appeal to the emerging middle class. He was also able to maintain his thematic focus on the importance of a virtuous citizenry to the success of a nation. If Muslim nations concerned themselves with commanding and forbidding as well as cultivating the strength of spirit and moral fiber required to do so, they would have the means to finally attain the material strength which eluded so many of them. It is for this reason that attention to ethical and spiritual formation (tarbiya) was so vital for al-Bannā’, and in his endeavor to cultivate this within the Brotherhood, he relied heavily on the conceptual vocabulary, social practices, and institutional structures of authority of Şūfism. Of course, this comes as no surprise considering al-Bannā’’s extensive time with the Ḥaṣāfiyya order during the formative years of his life.

Moreover, he not only wove elements of Şūfism into the Brotherhood’s DNA in terms of its institutional dynamics and models of ethical formation, but he also sought to defend a kind of “sharīʿa-minded” Şūfism, or what Saʿīd Ḥawwa and ‘Abd al-Salam Yassine, whom I discuss in subsequent chapters, referred to as “Salafi Şūfism” (al-taṣawwuf al-salafi), to his fellow Society members. This tradition of Şūfism, exemplified by figures such as al-Ghazālī and al-Shādhilī,
considered the exoteric religious sciences (ʿīlm) with their emphasis on the exterior (zāhir) as standing in a complementary relationship to the esoteric mystical traditions (tasawwuf) with their focus on the interior (bāṭin). Moreover, as al-Bannāʾ sought to make clear, this tradition often concerned itself with religious and social reform, and at times even engaged in armed resistance against colonial expansion, as was the case with the Sanūsī movement’s opposition to the Italians in Libya. However, as the Brotherhood moved into the late 1930s and early 1940s, al-Bannāʾ moved away from his explicit apologies on behalf of Ṣūfism and began to embrace a discourse more likely to appeal to the growing number of middle-class Brotherhood members who held skeptical views towards Ṣūfism, especially as an arm of the Egyptian state (Elmansoury 2012, 110-11). Concurrent with this transition, al-Bannāʾ began fashioning the Brotherhood in the image of a political party with the expectation that it move more directly into the political realm. Throughout this period, though al-Bannāʾ’s references to Ṣūfism in his communications with Society members ceased to be overt, its influence continued to be felt in the emphasis he placed on the stage of “formation” (takwīn) with its corresponding focus on tarbīya as crucial to the Brotherhood’s success. As we will see, embedded within al-Bannāʾ’s conception of tarbīya is a model of ethical formation which may best be described as a process of training interior dispositions through individual and social practices of bodily discipline so as to effect the refinement of character (tahdhīb al-akhlāq) and thus prepare the believer to be a virtuous activist in the struggle to establish an “Islamic order.”

As mentioned above, al-Bannāʾ defined the Brotherhood as a Salafī message, a Sunnī way, a Ṣūfī reality, a political movement, an athletic group, a cultural-educational union, an economic enterprise, and a social idea (1965, 248). What this formulation makes clear is that al-Bannāʾ did not seek to simply create another Ṣūfī order but rather incorporated elements from
Ṣūfism into the Society’s wider conceptual and institutional framework. Or put another way, David Commins states, “Banna did not reject Sufism’s pursuit of a personal relationship with God, rather he invented a new organizational framework for that pursuit” (2008, 131). Thus, beyond the weekly lectures on Ṣūfism which were held at the headquarters in Cairo in the early to mid-1930s, a number of the training programs came to reflect its influence as well (Lia 1998, 115). A key component of the Society’s training regimen involved the use of prayer litanies and dhikr sessions, and the manual for these activities, entitled the “Message Regarding Invocations” (“Risālat al-Māʾthūrāt”), was written by al-Bannā’ in the mid-1930s as a guide containing formulas for the correct invocation of God and advice on proper etiquette (adāb) for the performance of dhikr. Moreover, branches were instructed to observe an “Eternity Day” (yawm al-ākhira) once a month, on which they would refine (yaṣqilu) their hearts and selves by escaping the world of noisiness (dawdāʾ) and commotion (harj) and visiting the graves of Cairo’s “city of the hereafter” to demonstrate respect (ʿitibār) and encourage reflection (2011, 238). Despite al-Bannā’’s insistence in adhering to a tradition of Ṣūfism anchored in the Qurʾān and Sunna, such practices as performing dhikr and visiting the graves of certain “friends of God” (awliyyāʾ) were enough to draw the ire of a number of Salafī societies who labeled early Brotherhood members as “dervishes” (darāwīsh) (Lia 1998, 116).32

Another notable imprint of Ṣūfism on the Brotherhood lay in its structures of authority and overall organizational ethos. In addition to the administrative units mentioned above which

---

32 While the adoption of certain Ṣūfī practices proved to be controversial among Cairo’s salafī reformist circles, Lia notes its success among other populations: “There can be little doubt that be accepting a correct and reformed Sufism the Society managed to bridge the gap between traditional and modern religious practices. It therefore filled an important function for many young Muslims who were steeped in Sufi traditions or had an attachment to Sufi rituals, but who were disenchanted by the excesses and backwardness of some of the Sufī orders” (1998, 116).
included “areas,” “districts,” and “branches,” the personnel units consisted of, in descending order of size, “battalions” (katāʾ ib), “groups” (arḥāṭ), “clans” (ʿashāʾ ir), and “families” (usar) (Mitchell 1993, 197). At the apex of this hierarchy was al-Bannāʾ who took the title of “general guide” (al-murshid al-ʿām). In contrast to other terms he might have used such as “head” (raʾīs) or “leader” (zaʿīm), al-Bannāʾ adopted the same title employed by the shaykh of a Ṣūfī order (i.e. murshid), thus enabling him to present his relationship to other Society members in spiritual terms. Additionally, such a leadership model also allowed him to demand an oath of obedience (bayʿa) from the entire membership. Within this overall hierarchy, one ascended the ranks in much the same way that Ṣūfīs conceived advancement through the stations (maqamāt) of one’s spiritual journey, that is, by mastering elements of the group’s program of ethical and bodily discipline and gaining higher degrees of initiation (Lia 1998, 117). Such a spiritual meritocracy coupled with a “vanguard” mentality contributed much to creating an ethos in which Brotherhood members viewed themselves as righteous warriors set apart to liberate Egyptian society from its mental and material enslavement to ways of being not in accordance with “true Islam.” While this conception held Marxist-Leninist resonances, it also accorded with the common Ṣūfī distinction between the elite (khawāṣṣ) and the masses (ʿawāmm) wherein Ṣūfīs possessed privileged access to God and reality in ways not available to anyone else.33 Consequently, al-Bannāʾ “thought of himself as belonging to a special class of people, as a

---

33 We have no evidence that al-Bannāʾ read Marx or Lenin; however, the notion of a vanguard paving the way for broader socio-political change was a part of early twentieth-century Egypt’s zeitgeist that made its way into the ideological outlook of a number of political movements and parties. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi’ refers to this as well as al-Bannāʾ’s ideological critique of colonialism as a kind of “Third-Worldism,” thus placing him in the same intellectual universe as not only Sayyid Qutb but also figures such as Ho Chi Minh and Franz Fanon. For more on this, see Abu-Rabi’ (1996, 79-88).
person responding to a special call, and as a true believer with a mission” (Abu-Rabi’ 1996, 67).\textsuperscript{34}

Arguably the aspect of al-Bannāʾ’s experience with Ṣūfism which left the most indelible mark on the Brotherhood was his emphasis on and program for ethical and spiritual formation (\textit{tarbīya}). \textit{Tarbīya} constituted the focus of the stage of “formation” (\textit{takwīn}) which was the second of three stages for the Brotherhood movement (the first being “acquaintance” (\textit{taʿrīf}) and the final being “execution” (\textit{tanfīdh})). As a result of this focus, al-Bannāʾ believed it to be the most crucial stage of \textit{daʿwa} for without it, action taken in pursuit of Society objectives could not be properly directed.\textsuperscript{35} Engaging patiently in the “\textit{jihād} of the self” (\textit{jihād al-nafs}) was necessary because, as stated in the prophetic \textit{hadīth}, “[t]he strong man is not one who wrestles well, but the strong man is rather one who controls himself when angry (\textit{ghāḍab})” (2005, 143). Consequently, the model of ethical formation found in al-Bannāʾ's conception of \textit{tarbīya} holistically incorporated both practical and spiritual elements so as to effect a complete personal transformation in the Society’s members.\textsuperscript{36} Mitchell captures well al-Bannāʾ’s comprehensive approach when he writes,

\textsuperscript{34} Abu-Rabi’ notes the understanding of this distinction which was held and taught by Abū ʿl-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), whose writings would have assuredly been read by al-Bannāʾ as a member of the Ḥaṣāfiyya order which traces its lineage to the Shādhiliyya. According to al-Shādhilī, the \textit{khāṣṣa} are the people that God has “drawn away from evil-doing and its roots, and employed for well-doing and its branches. He made them love the places of solitude (\textit{khalāwāt}) and opened before them the path of spiritual communion (\textit{munājā}). He made Himself known to them and they came to know Him…. They are not veiled from Him; rather they are veiled with Him from others. They know only Him, and love none but Him” (Abu-Rabi’ quoting al-Shādhilī 1996, 286).

\textsuperscript{35} In his study of al-Bannāʾ’s thought, contemporary spiritual-guide of the Brotherhood Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926) echoes this sentiment, stating that \textit{tarbīya} is the most important element of any “large-scale movement” (\textit{al-ḥaraka al-ḍakhma}) (1979, 4).

\textsuperscript{36} In his discussion of models of education in various modern (predominantly Arab) Islamist movements, Meir Hatina draws attention to the effect al-Bannāʾ and the early Brotherhood’s approach to \textit{tarbīya} had on other such movements. He writes that the “gradualist approach of the Brotherhood … dictated co-existence with the state. However, eschewing the resort to force did not mean easing the
The object of the instruction was the reconstruction of what may be called the member’s ‘Islamic personality’, the reaffirmation of the ‘total’ Muslim in the multiple areas of man’s behaviour—religious, ethical, social, economic, and political. While the approach was thus general in theory, in practice, an inordinate amount of the instruction was focused on the daily moral and social behaviour of the members; these were aphorisms, usually with a textual base in the Qur’an or the Traditions, which pointed to set forms of phrase and behaviour for appropriate times of the day and on various occasions. (1993, 199)

In devising the aphorisms, liturgical litanies, and other individual and social practices alluded to above for his program of *tarbiya*, al-Bannā’ relied heavily on Šūfī rituals and vocabulary. This was so because for al-Bannā’, Šūfism was the “heart” (*lubb*) and “essence” (*samīm*) of Islam. Best understood as the “sciences of ethical formation and proper conduct” (*ʿulūm al-tarbiya wa al-sulūk*), Šūfism, with its devotional practices and insights into ethical psychology, possessed substantial resources for cultivating the character and virtues necessary for effective *daʿwa* and socio-political activism (2011, 21).

Far from competing with the Qurʾān, Sunna, or Islamic law (*sharīʿa*) in the quest to mold a pious and socially engaged believer, al-Bannā’ maintained that Šūfism, properly understood and practiced, complemented them. It is worth recalling that prior to creating the Brotherhood, al-Bannā’ had been a committed member of the Ḥaṣāfiyya order which adhered to a “*sharīʿa*-minded” Šūfism that considered discursive religious knowledge (*ʿilm*), including Qurʾānic exegesis (*tafsīr*) and jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and the mystical quest (*taṣawwuf*) to be complimentary. Therefore, al-Bannā’ advocated an approach to Šūfism which was anchored in struggle over society’s morality. This struggle, depicted as a religious duty that ‘could not be ignored or compromised’, aimed at reinstating the cohesiveness of the nation and heightening its self-dignity, which would also deter foreign aggression against it. Education (*tarbiya*) was a major vehicle to achieve these aims. The tone, inspiration and pedagogic emphases in *tarbiya* were forged by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt from the 1930s onwards and were quickly adopted by similar movements in the Arab world” (2006, 182).
the Qurʾān, Sunna, and sharīʿa, an approach he observes was shared by early Baghdad Ṣūfī al-Junayd (d. 298/910) who stated, “[o]ur knowledge is bound by the Qurʾān and Sunna, and who does not listen to the hadīth and sit with the jurists (fuqahāʾ) … corruption follows him.” (2005, 35). In an article for the Muslim Brotherhood daily newspaper (Jaridāt al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn) entitled “Sharīʿa, the Path, and the Reality or the Outer Science and the Inner Science” (“Sharīʿa, ṭarīqa, wa ḥaqīqa aw ‘Īlm al-ẓāhir wa al-ʿilm al-bāṭin”), al-Bannā’ discusses the relationship between these religious sciences in conceptual terms which had been common throughout much of Islamic history. Unfortunately, he notes, sharīʿa, Ṣūfism (i.e. the ṭarīqa), and the transcendent reality towards which they both aim (i.e. the ḥaqīqa) are considered as isolated phenomena which have little to do with or even contradict one another. These, however, cannot be separated because the sharīʿa and the ṭarīqa are the required means to realize the ḥaqīqa, and likewise, there are no sources for the ḥaqīqa other than the knowledge and actions required by the sharīʿa and the ṭarīqa (39).

Further elaborating on the relationship between the sharīʿa and the ṭarīqa, or alternatively between fiqh and taṣawwuf, al-Bannā’ appropriated the interior (bāṭin)/exterior (ẓāhir) conceptual binary which divides the labor for the cultivation of virtue in spatially complimentary terms. In an article entitled, “The Outward Science and the Interior Science” (“ʿĪlm al-ẓāhir wa al-ʿilm al-bāṭin”), al-Bannā’ states that the sharīʿa is the reform of the outer (ẓāhir) extremities that leads one to the path (ṭarīqa) for obtaining the inner (bāṭin) secrets

---

37 This collection of essays on various topics related to Ṣūfism is drawn from articles written by al-Bannā’ in the Jaridāt in the early to mid-1930s. Among other things, they indicate the interest al-Bannā’ had early on in fostering a sympathetic view towards Ṣūfism among Society members. Of note is that were collected and published in 2005 by Egyptian Brotherhood member ʿIṣām Talīmah. One wonders if he was attempting to challenge those portraits of al-Bannā’ which marginalized his involvement with and support of Ṣūfism or even if there has been a resurgent interest in this aspect of the Brotherhood’s early history among its Egyptian members.
required for reaching that reality (ḥaqīqa) which is the removal of the veil and the witnessing of the beloved (40). For the outer science, that is, the sharīʿa, the goal is to obtain discursive knowledge (ʿilm) and perform action (ʿamal), while for the inner science, that is, the ḥaqīqa, the goal is unveiling (kashf) and understanding (fahm) (41). Throughout his discussion of the exterior and interior sciences, al-Bannāʾ references a number of prominent historical Şūfīs such as Sahl al-Tустārī (d. 283/896) and Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021); however, he extensively cites al-Ghazālī and his Revival of the Religious Sciences (42). For al-Ghazālī, the “inner science” (ʿilm al-bāṭin) is the “end” (ghāya) of the religious sciences, and its possessor is known by the light emanating from the “mirror of the heart” (mirāt al-qalb). Enjoying the fruits of the “inner sciences” necessitates travel on the path of the “exterior sciences” for it is only in the bodily discipline that accompanies moral training (riyāda) that one is kept from tarnishing the mirror of the heart. Just as the body in its early stages has not been fully created but evolves over time with proper nutrition, so too the self is created deficient, subject to perfection (kamāl) through ethical and spiritual formation (tarbīya) and the refinement of character (tahdhīb al-akhlāq) (42). Related to this process of disciplining the body in order to shape interior dispositions and cultivate virtue, al-Bannāʾ argued that tarbīya also develops the innate awareness (al-shuʿūr al-fiṭra) and inner-most conscience (ḍamīr) and feeling (wijdān) which were imprinted on humans by the spirit of God.38 For this reason, al-Bannāʾ claimed that tarbīya

38 This notion of a human nature (fitra) is drawn from both the Qurʾān and prophetic hadīth. For example, in Q. 7:172 there is reference to a “primordial covenant” between God and humankind which was entered into prior to the day of creation when God took Adam and his progeny and “made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes, we have testified.’ [This] – lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, ‘Indeed, of this we were unaware’” (Sahih International). And among hadīth, there is one which states, “[e]very newborn is born with the natural constitution (fitra). Then, his parents make him a Jew, Christian, or Zoroastrian. This is like an animal that bears another that is perfect of limb” (Muslim).
formed a crucial part not only of the formation of Brotherhood members but children as well (121).

By engaging in such individual and social practices as *dhikr*, all-night prayer vigils, *daʿwa*, and commanding right and forbidding wrong which were fundamental elements of al-Bannāʾ’s program of *tarbīya*, Brotherhood members trained their desires and cultivated certain virtues in order to more effectively accomplish the Society’s objectives of establishing an “Islamic order.” Perhaps most important to al-Bannāʾ was *dhikr*, or the meditative remembrance of God. The performance of this ritual imparted humility (*khushūʿa*) and truthfulness (*ṣidq*) which in turn fostered submission to God, and moreover, by practicing it among fellow believers without ostentation and according to a certain orderly *adāb*, group solidarity and spiritual harmony were encouraged (1965, 416, 418-19). Other virtues cited by al-Bannāʾ as being crucial to the Brotherhood’s success included sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), fidelity (*wafāʾ*), modesty (*hayaʾ*), and patience (*ṣabr*) (1980, 6, 33-34). By engaging in the rituals alluded to above equipped with the guidance provided by their *murshid* al-Bannāʾ, Brotherhood members instilled these virtues in themselves which enabled better discernment of the ethical and spiritual elements undergirding the duties required of them as believers. This was crucial because, as al-Bannāʾ lamented, many upheld and performed the religion’s outer statutes (*al-farāʾ ida al-ẓāhira*)

---

39 In making this point about *dhikr*, al-Bannāʾ cites Q. 33:35 which states, “[i]ndeed the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do, the men who remember (*dhakirīn*) God often and the women who do so (*dhakirat*)—for them God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward” (Sahih International).

40 Recognizing the importance of patience as the Brotherhood sought to bring about the transformation of Egyptian society, al-Bannāʾ wrote that though many people associate patience with confronting such conditions as illness and pain, the most important effects of patience were for the practitioners of *daʿwa* for they honor the possibility of death no less than those on the path of *jihād* (1980, 34).
without possession of the Islamic soul (al-nafs al-Islāmiyya) and Islamic spirit (al-rūḥ al-Islāmī).

Without attending to the interior life of character and virtue, the Muslim community would continue to suffer the indignity of domination by corrupt leaders and colonial occupiers. For confirmation of this, al-Bannā’ noted, one need only consult Q. 13:11 which states, “God will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves” (6-9). Moreover, with such virtues as truthfulness (ṣidq), sincerity (ikhlāṣ), and patience (ṣabr), Brotherhood members were equipped with a “strong will” (ʿazma quwiyaa) and “constant faith” (imān thabāt) to be steadfast in their quest as the “people of da’wa” (ahl al-da’wa) to effect the transformation of Egyptian society (36).

Thus, while al-Bannā’’s approach of tarbīya entailed the training of one’s desires for the cultivation virtue so as to bring about a kind of individual flourishing within Brotherhood members, it also conceived this process as preparation for public and even socio-political engagement which was just as crucial to the development of virtuous character. For al-Bannā’, tarbīya possessed both individual and social and public dimensions. Rather than operating in autonomous realms according to different logics, these realms were better understood as interdependent parts of one coherent process of ethical formation. We find this reflected in his letter “To What Do We Summon Humankind” (“Ilā ay shayʾ nadʿū al-nās”) where he declares,

…the Truth (Blessed and Almighty is God!) showed humankind the connection between the commandments laid on the individual, such as prayer and fasting, and the commandments laid on the community, and showed that the first were the means to the second. Also that true doctrine was the foundation of both together, so that there should be no way for people to shirk their individual obligations by arguing that they were carrying out their communal ones; nor should there be any way for others to shirk their communal works with the argument that they were preoccupied with their ritual obligations and totally absorbed in their communion with God. (1965, 139; 1978, 81)

In this paradigm then, individual and communal obligations interpenetrate and reinforce one another in that, while the virtues produced from carrying out one’s individual duties prepare one
to meet her communal responsibilities, the performance of those communal obligations presents an opportunity to exercise and further enhance those virtues which are cultivated in the meeting of one’s individual duties. For example, as noted above by al-Bannā’, the practice of dhikr imparted the virtue of sincerity (ikhlāṣ) which makes one more effective and conscientious in their daʿwa or when commanding and forbidding. And correspondingly, as one exercised this virtue in carrying out these communal obligations, a broader understanding of its nature was engendered which in turn enabled further insights when performing dhikr. And this dialectical process then repeated in an escalating manner as one progressed through the stations (maqamāt) towards greater spiritual awareness and understanding. Consequently, within this framework, the process of ethical formation takes place on both the individual and communal plane, and because they form two interdependent parts of a virtuous whole, short shrifting one inevitably has deleterious effects on the other. For al-Bannā’, the exemplars who recognized the interdependence of the individual and the communal as well as of piety and action were the Companions (ṣahāba) of the prophet Muḥammad whom he referred to as “monks by night and knights by day” (ruḥbān bil-layl wa fursān bil-nahār) (1965, 140; 1978, 82). In their intense asceticism and all-night prayer vigils which they practiced in preparation for the jihād they subsequently waged, al-Bannā’ believed that they served as paradigmatic Muslims for the Brotherhood. As such, he praised their ability to combine matters of piety with the affairs of the world, declaring, “[b]y God, what was that miraculous harmonizing, that rare coupling, that unique mixture compounded by the works and duties of this world combined with the affairs and spirituality of the next? Why, it was nothing but Islam, which combines the best features of everything!” (1965, 140; 1978, 82).
Conclusion

As is evident, for al-Bannā’, individual and communal flourishing were deeply intertwined. In fact, he believed that a “Muslim will never become a real Muslim if he is not political and has a view for the affairs of his people” (Lia quoting al-Bannā’ 1998, 202). With his conception of tarbīya, al-Bannā’ sought to inculcate in Brotherhood members a virtuous character and understanding of Islam wherein individual piety and flourishing necessarily entailed pursuit of the common good, which for the Society meant the establishment of an “Islamic order.” In this endeavor, al-Bannā’ relied on the discourse of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” to conceptualize the Society as a virtuous vanguard engaged in the da’wa of education and socio-political activism or even the jihād of armed struggle. To be sure, we find al-Bannā’ discussing the duty in classical terms when, invoking the “three modes” tradition, he informs Brotherhood members that they should command and forbid, not by hand (yad), which is appropriate only for those in authority, but by heart (qalb) and tongue (lisān) in the form of giving sound advice (naṣīha). However, it was his use of certain Qur’ānic passages such as Q. 3:110a to speak of the Society as a vanguard (“You are the best nation …”) that left a more lasting impact. The notion of the Brotherhood as an ethico-spiritual elite responsible for disabusing the slumbering masses of their “false-consciousness” pervaded the Society’s ethos, and the discourse of commanding and forbidding played a pivotal role in the creation of that ethos. Beyond conceiving the Brotherhood as a vanguard, al-Bannā’ also employed the vocabulary of commanding and forbidding so as to appeal to the emerging nationalist consciousness of early twentieth-century Egypt. Egypt’s national destiny lay, al-Bannā’ asserted, not in military dominance or economic superiority, but in commanding and forbidding among
the nations of the world. By carrying out this duty on a global stage, Egypt performed a geopolitical *da’wa* and thus demonstrated the moral superiority of Islamic nationalism.

However, whether referring to a vanguard or an Islamic nation, al-Bannā’ consistently maintained that the most important element for the success of reforming the *umma* resided in ethical and spiritual formation (*tarbīya*). As documented above, al-Bannā’ appropriated Ṣūfī vocabulary and practices, not only in his efforts to create a program of *tarbīya*, but also in fashioning the Brotherhood’s organizational structures and institutions of authority, all of which he presided over as the “general guide” (*al-murshid al-ʿām*), expecting complete obedience just as the shaykh of a Ṣūfī order. In the early years of the Brotherhood, al-Bannā’ openly proclaimed its Ṣūfī lineage and even sought to educate members of those traditions of Ṣūfism, like his own Ḥaṣāfiyya order, which anchored themselves in the Qurʾān, Sunna, and *sharīʿa* and promoted social engagement. Over time, however, al-Bannā’ realized the emerging middle-class professionals who constituted a large portion of the membership remained intransigent in their skepticism towards Ṣūfism which they perceived as having antinomian and apolitical proclivities. Moreover, with the vast majority of the orders under the authority the state-run Ṣūfī Council (*Majlis al-Ṣūfī*), Ṣūfism was widely viewed as a corrupting force in the fight for Egyptian liberation. Consequently, al-Bannā’ modulated his rhetoric and teachings to downplay Ṣūfism in order to accommodate the growing popularity of nationalist discourse and parties in Egyptian public life. Following al-Bannā’’s death in 1949, Brotherhood members took his previous employment of Ṣūfī discourse and practice and translated it into a kind of “social spirituality” (*al-rūḥāniyya al-ijtamʿāiyya*) which, in many ways, was a watered-down Ṣūfism...
that emphasized *tarbīya* in a non-Ṣūfī idiom. While the Egyptian Brotherhood failed to continue al-Bannā’’s affirmation of a “*sharīʿa*-minded” Ṣūfism, there were other prominent Islamist figures who sought to emulate precisely this aspect of al-Bannā’’s activist program. As we will see, Syrian Muslim Brotherhood thinker and Naqshbandī Ṣūfī, Saʿīd Ἡawwa, and ʿAbd al-Salam Yassine, founder of the Moroccan Justice and Benevolence Association, viewed al-Bannā’ as an exemplar of the approach to ethical and spiritual formation they believed was crucial to the success of modern Muslim movements seeking religious and socio-political reform. For Ἡawwa and Yassine, the conception of *tarbīya* they found, not only in al-Bannā’, but even more expansively in al-Ghazālī, construed the exoteric religious sciences (*ʿilm*) and the esoteric mystical traditions (*tašawwuf*) of Islam in complementary terms, and as a result was able to attend to both the interior and exterior dimensions of Muslim life. Moreover, within this paradigm, *tarbīya*’s *raison d’être* was a socially engaged vision of religious reform. Both Ἡawwa and Yassine incorporated this notion of *tarbīya* within their overall Islamist thought, and as a result, it is they, not the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, who should be considered the true heirs of al-Bannā’’s legacy.

---

41 Writing about the Society a number of years after al-Bannā’’s death, Brotherhood member Muhammad Zakī states, “the Brothers are spiritual ones (*rūhāniyyūn*) … who behave in their lives according to the devotional aspects of the people of Sufism (*ahl al-taşawwuf*) and they are also social creatures (*ijtamʿāiyyūn*) who eat meals and walk in the marketplaces, and mingle with all different kinds of people … and they consider themselves in both cases to be those waging *jihād* (*mujāhidīn*)” (1980, 53). At work here is an implicit assumption that to act in a manner commensurate with the “people of Sufism (*ahl al-taşawwuf*)” is to focus on one’s devotional life understood in individualistic and private terms to the exclusion of social engagement. As we have seen, for al-Bannā’, pious devotion cannot be separated from one’s obligation to meet one’s communal responsibilities, for doing so is just as much a part of developing virtuous character as prayer and fasting.
CHAPTER 3

“SALAFĪ ṢŪFISM” AND THE SYRIAN MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD; OR TARBĪYA, VIRTUE, AND ACTIVISM IN THE THOUGHT OF SAʿĪD ḤAWWA

“…the contemporary Islamic movement has adopted Ṣūfī spiritual education in both idea and behavior, a truth attested to by ustādh al-Bannāʾ when he recalled … in his ‘Letter to the Fifth Conference’ that the properties of our daʿwa are in reality Ṣūfī; in his Memoirs he also referred to the opposition he faced regarding the place of Ṣūfism within Islam … the effect of which was for many of the sons of the Islamic movement to feel a spiritual hollowness…”

— Saʿīd Ḥawwa, Our Spiritual Education

In this chapter, I focus on the interpretation and use of the “commanding right and forbidding wrong” (al-amr biʾl-maʿrūf waʾl-nahy ʿan al-munkar) discourse by Syrian Muslim Brotherhood thinker and Naqshbandī Ṣūfī, Saʿīd Ḥawwa (d. 1989). In the conclusion of the previous chapter, I claimed that in their embrace of Ṣūfī thought and practice for Islamist ends, Ḥawwa and Yassine, rather than the Egyptian Brotherhood, were al-Bannāʾ’s true intellectual progeny. In regards to Ḥawwa specifically and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood more generally, Itzchak Weismann agrees. For Weismann, this stemmed primarily from the fact that the early generations of the Syrian Brotherhood were constituted by and maintained cordial relations with members of the religious scholarly establishment, including jurists (ʿulamāʾ) and Ṣūfīs. Such a disposition, as we have seen, stood in marked contrast to the Egyptian Brotherhood which by and large viewed the religious establishment with skepticism and suspicion. Consequently, rather than opposing the ʿulamāʾ and Ṣūfīs, the Syrian Brotherhood cooperated with them and even sought their advice. In this way, Weismann observes, “the Syrian Brothers were closer to Bannāʾ’s heritage than were his followers in Egypt” (2010, 3).
Following in the footsteps of al-Bannā’, I argue that Ḥawwa represents a “Ghazalian” tradition of Islamist thought and practice that was thoroughly shaped by Islamic mysticism, or Ṣūfism (taṣawwuf). As such, it subverts both academic scholarship and popular perceptions which have perpetuated a Salafi-Ṣūfī divide wherein commitments to Salafism and Ṣūfism are taken to be inherently at odds with one another.1 Describing his thought as a kind of “Salafi Ṣūfism” (al-taṣawwuf al-salafi), Ḥawwa construed these two elements as complimentary rather than contradictory and considered himself as belonging to a reformist middle way that sought to address the interior and exterior dimensions of Muslim life while avoiding the extremes of legalism and mysticism (1979, 12). This tradition, Ḥawwa claimed, included not only Ḥasan al-Bannā’ (d. 1949), whom I have already discussed, but also leading lights of the Naqshbandiyya such as Sheikh Diya al-Dīn Khālid (d.1827), Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1762), and Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624).2 However, it was al-Ghazālī (d. 504/1111), more than any other figure from classical and early modern Islamic history, who Ḥawwa took to be an exemplar and model for the activist vision of reform he advocated.3

1 For more on this, see Weismann 2001b. It should be noted that even for those Islamist thinkers who were deeply suspicious of Ṣūfism such as Abū al-A’lā Mawdūdī (d. 1979), founder of Pakistan’s Jama’at-e-Islāmī, and Muslim Brotherhood thinker, Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), an extremely attenuated form of Ṣūfism was viewed as providing essential resources for proper ethical formation. For example, see Mawdūdī’s reply to a letter asking about Ṣūfism and the image of the spiritual guide (murshid) wherein he expresses support for a Ṣūfism whose object is “devotion and attention to God.” He, however, goes on to condemn those types of Ṣūfism in which “Greek and Stoic, Zoroastria [sic.] and Vedantic philosophies have got mixed up” and which “have incorporated monastic and yogic practices and customs and polytheistic ideas…” (Mawdūdī 1999 (first published 1963), 105). Some scholars have explored and analyzed more substantially the ways in which Ṣūfī thought and practice shaped early Sunnī Islamist thinkers, most notably al-Bannā’. They include, but are not limited to, Abu-Rabi’ 1996; Euben and Zaman 2009; Lapidus 2002; Rahnema 2005; Voll 1994; and Weismann 2001a and 2001b.

2 For a historical survey of these figures, see Voll 1994, 33-145. For more in-depth studies, see, for Sheikh Khalid, Weismann 2007b; for Shāh Walī Allāh, his 2010 treatise on Islamic law translated by Marcia Hermansen; and for Aḥmad Sirhindī, Buehler 2012.

3 Ḥawwa was not alone in looking to al-Ghazālī’s thought as an authoritative source for cultivating effective activists. As Saba Mahmood points out, Islamist circles in Egypt frequently cited al-
As discussed in the introduction, this “Salafī Şūfism” presents a challenge to those conceptual methodologies that characterize the thought and practices of “Islamism” or “political Islam” using analytical frameworks which focus on the sociological dimensions, political objectives, and modern contours of Islamist movements, thus often neglecting the patterns of practical reasoning, models of ethical formation, and even organizational structures that may be said to span both classical Islam and some traditions of modern Islamism. Consequently, the multifaceted discourses of Islamist groups get reductively obscured, and as a result, little attention is given to the telling differences between the discourses espoused by those groups which hold similar political objectives. One such area of difference and contention among Islamist groups was and continues to be that of Şūfism. As we have seen, following al-Bannāʾ’s death, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood developed a robust skepticism towards Şūfism, a skepticism that would spread throughout the Arab world and beyond. By examining the activist thought of Ḥawwa, himself a leading intellectual of the Syrian Brotherhood and a member of the Naqshbandī Şūfī order, a better understanding of the conflicting points of view among Islamist movements regarding Şūfism is attained.

As we will find, Ḥawwa’s understanding of the discourse of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” is in many ways closely tied to that found in classical treatments, most notably in his account of the duty which is taken nearly verbatim from al-Ghazālī’s Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyāʾ ‘ulūm al-dīn); however, he also adapted it so as to achieve his larger objectives of conceptualizing and creating an organized movement of committed activists

---

4 For a historical survey of the debate and conflict surrounding Şūfism among different Muslim groups, including Islamists, see De Jong and Radtke 1999.
to challenge and ultimately overthrow the Syrian regime of Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad (d. 2000). Unlike ‘Abduh, Riḍā, al-Bannā’, and as we will see, Yassine, Ḥawwa did not rely on Qur’ānic passages such as Q. 3:104 or Q. 3:110 to discuss the notion of a vanguard, although he did speak of a select group (ṭāʾifa) of the ethico-spiritual elite set apart as “soldiers of God” (jund Allah) to effect societal change. Rather, Ḥawwa employed the commanding and forbidding discourse in order to frame the duties of both jihād and daʿwa, a discursive move which was not uncommon in both classical and modern treatments. Appropriating the “three modes” classical convention, Ḥawwa presented the Syrian Brotherhood’s project as one which entailed waging jihād by the heart (qalb), jihād by the tongue (lisān), and jihād by the hand (yad). One’s ability or even obligation to perform this duty by heart, tongue, or hand was determined according to whether one resided in territory governed by Muslim authorities or not. For Ḥawwa, the al-Asad regime, with its affiliation with the ‘Alawī community, embrace of Western-styled secularism, and oppressive rule, constituted an imminent threat to the Muslim community and thus had to be forcefully confronted.

However, Ḥawwa cautioned patience in this endeavor so that adequate time and energy could be devoted to planning and preparation, most importantly in the area of ethical and spiritual formation (tarbīya). Like many other Islamist thinkers, Ḥawwa felt that the weakness of the umma had much to do with the lamentable state of Islam in the modern world. This weakness, he believed, stemmed from a moral and spiritual failing within Muslim countries.

---

5 In terms of carrying out the duty by means of the use of force, as Cook observes, classical scholars frequently discussed “forbidding wrong” in relation to jihād, though differences existed among scholars when it came to the precise nature of the relationship between them. Some considered “forbidding wrong” to be a species of jihād while others considered jihād to be a species of “forbidding wrong” (Cook 2000, 490-91). The duty was also viewed and appropriated by some Muslim groups, especially the Ismāʿīlī Fāṭamids, as a part of their daʿwa (Heinz 1997).
whose leaders and citizens had embraced such Western ideologies as secularism (ʿalamānīyya), nationalism (qawmīyya), and communism (shūyuʿīyya). Thus, for Ḥawwa, the duty to carry out daʿwa, “command right and forbid wrong,” and wage jihād began with attention to tarbiya, for only a vanguard with the requisite virtuous character could effectively engage in religious and socio-political activism. Ḥawwa’s approach to ethical and spiritual formation entailed a conception of virtue and character informed by a science of ethics (ʿilm al-ikhlāq) which relied on both exoteric (taʿlīm) and esoteric (tarbiya) forms of education. In this paradigm, ritual, whether in terms of law (fiqh) or Ṣūfī devotional practice, is considered an outward activity which trains interior attitudes and dispositions through a process of habituation so as to instill a certain set of virtues which lead ultimately to the acquisition of God-consciousness (taqwa) and spiritual beneficence (iḥsān). A further component of this process results from the reality of human sociality wherein those virtues which are cultivated by means of ritual and devotional practice are honed and further cultivated in public settings. Thus, Hawwa spoke of suitable comportment (adāb) in a range of areas from dress, table manners, travel, and spiritual guide (murshid)-novice (murīd) relationships to the performance of daʿwa, “commanding right and forbidding wrong,” and engaging in socio-political activism, even to the point of using force to bring about regime change.

In what follows, I begin with a biographical sketch and overview of Hawwa’s thought followed by an analysis of the place of the “commanding right and forbidding wrong” discourse in it. I then examine Hawwa’s understanding of Ṣūfism and the role it played in his model of spiritual and ethical formation. As will become evident, Ṣūfī thought and devotional practice were crucial in his conception of tarbiya wherein rituals such as observing silence (ṣamt), fellowship (ṣuhba), and meditative remembrance (dhikr) played a pivotal role in the cultivation
of character and virtue. Moreover, this process entailed public activism in the forms of daʿwa and “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” For him, these social practices both required and served to cultivate those virtues formed through ritual and devotional practice. Therefore, we find in Ḥawwa a model of ethical formation in which the individual and the social operate interdependently, so that the refinement of character occurs, not simply through the cultivation of individual piety, but also through socio-political exchange and interaction.

**Saʿīd Ḥawwa and the Jihād of “Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong”**

Ḥawwa was born in 1935 in the impoverished ʿAlīlīyyat quarter of the city of Ḥamāh, long regarded as a center of religious conservatism in Syria (Weismann 1993, 603). His father, Muḥammad Dib Ḥawwa, was a political activist in the 1930s who represented his community’s agricultural laborers (fellāhīn) against the landowners and their agents, eventually joining the Syrian Arab Socialist Party (Ḥizb al-ʿArabī al-İștirākī). Though the younger Ḥawwa was not old enough to participate in this movement, he later recalled in his autobiography that through it, even as a child, he “became witness to dynamism and planning” and learned “the ways of planning how to obtain control of the street” (606). While his father’s political activism was to exert a significant amount of influence on Ḥawwa, it was his secondary education at the Ibn Rushd school that more thoroughly shaped him for it was there that he came under the tutelage of Sheikh Muḥammad al-Hāmid who, in addition to teaching at the school, was a sheikh in the Naqshbandī Şūfi order and one of the founders of the local Muslim Brotherhood branch (Weismann 1997, 133). It was through the influence of al-Hāmid that Ḥawwa was to become a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and join the Naqshbandī ṣarīqa, both of which he remained committed to for the rest of his life. It is worth noting that al-Hāmid began his involvement with
the Muslim Brotherhood in the late 1930s and early 1940s when he traveled to Cairo in order to continue his studies at al-Azhar. During this time, he befriended al-Bannā’ and became his close associate, viewing himself as a guide of sorts to al-Bannā’ in areas of faith and practice in which he felt al-Bannā’ was in error. However, this should not take away from the fact that he came to revere al-Bannā’ and his mission, so much so that he helped found the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood upon returning to his native country in 1942 (Weismann 1993, 610).

As a result of the prominent role which al-Hāmid and the Naqshbandī order played in forming Ḥawwa’s thought and approach to activism, a word on the Ṣūfī ṭarīqa is in order. The order was founded in the eighth/fourteenth century by Baha’ al-Dīn Naqshband, a native of Bukhara in present day Uzbekistan; however, the chain (silsila) of the order may be traced back to Abu Bakr, the first link after the prophet Muḥammad (Weismann 1993, 609). The order considers its doctrine to be that of the first generation, or ṣaḥāba, which sought to integrate both external activity and internal formation into one coherent form of devotional life. The former element is attested to in the Naqshbandī tradition of social and political engagement to bring about the rule of God. The latter element is located in the ritual of dhikr (meditative remembrance) which involves the silent and inward chanting of God’s names in order to develop a constant sense of the divine presence (ḥudūr). In this way, the order maintains an orthodoxy based on religious knowledge (ʿilm) on the one hand, and embraces the mystical quest (taṣawwuf) through a master’s guidance, on the other (Weismann 2001, 30). Its adherents therefore believe that the mystical experience must be subordinated to the precepts of the

---

6 For example, one historically finds this socio-political activism in such Naqshbandī leaders as Sheikh Shāmil al-Naqshbandī (d. 1871) who fought against Russian colonialism and Sheikh Said of Palu who in 1925 revolted against the secular and anti-Kurdish policies of Atatürk.
sharīʿa; however, without adopting the Ṣūfī path in order to purify the heart and engender the love of God (mahābba), complete obedience to the sharīʿa is not possible. Hence, the Naqshbandī order recognizes no contradiction between ʿilm and taṣawwuf; in fact, both are conceived as two complementary aspects of the path of the prophet’s companions (31).”

It was under the guidance of al-Hāmid and the Naqshbandī Ŧarīqa that Ḥawwa both continued his studies and become increasingly involved in the affairs of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. In the late 1950s, he pursued study in Islamic law at the University of Damascus. He graduated in 1961 and soon moved back to Ḥamāh where he took a position as teacher of Islamic culture (Weismann 1993, 615). During this time, the Muslim Brotherhood was attempting to organize an effective resistance to the secular and socialist Baʿath party whose military wing had just seized power in 1963. The Muslim Brotherhood leadership, led by ʿIsām al-ʿAṭār, soon found itself in exile after the Baʿath regime banned the organization. Moreover, the decision by al-ʿAṭār and his followers to focus on non-violent resistance was soon challenged by an ascendant wing led by Marwān Ḥadīd. Ḥadīd, who had recently brought Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood thinker Sayyid Quṭb’s (d. 1966) more radical teachings to Syria, advocated an unyielding violent struggle with the Baʿath.

Following a disastrous attempt by Ḥadīd and his associates to lead a revolt in Ḥamāh in 1964, Ḥawwa was tasked with reformulating Muslim Brotherhood doctrine in the face of Baʿath rule. It was during this time that he became established as a prominent Islamic thinker and put forward a comprehensive program that represented a middle way between al-ʿAṭār and Ḥadīd, emphasizing the importance of careful planning and organizational development for a future

7 For more on the Naqshbandī order, see Algar 1971; Ernst 1997; Knysh 2005; and Weismann 2007a.
struggle (Weismann 1997, 133). However, the periodic imprisonment and exile Ḥawwa endured for the remainder of his life greatly diminished his ability to exert any substantial influence on the organization which became increasingly radicalized by its violent confrontations with al-Asad’s regime. These culminated in the 1982 massacre in Ḥamāh which effectively wiped out the Muslim Brotherhood’s presence in Syria. By this time, Ḥawwa was already in exile in Jordan where he was to live and continue writing in support of the cause until his death in 1989.

As mentioned above, Ḥawwa believed that in order to confront the political, economic, social, and ideological challenges that Muslims faced throughout the world, reform should be initiated from within. It should not then surprise us to find that in his most extensive discussion of socio-political activism, *Soldiers of God: Culturally and Ethically (Jund Allāh: thaqāfatan wa-akhlāqan)*, Ḥawwa devotes more than eighty percent of his discussion on *jihād* to the execution of this duty among fellow believers, a conceptual move made possible by the fact that he conceived *jihād* in terms of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” The nineteenth century conquest of the Muslim world by imperialist Europe had enabled the West to exploit the

---

8 In his work on Islamist thought, Emmanuel Sivan seems to present Ḥawwa as a follower of Qutb when he writes that “Hawwa – like Qutb before him – carries [Neo-Hanbalite premises] one step further; what was hitherto a conservative-vigilante tradition is thereby pushed into a revolutionary orbit” (1990, 105-06). It is undoubtedly true that Ḥawwa shared Qutb’s belief that certain regimes which supported corrupt (*fāsad*) beliefs and practices that were tantamount to apostasy (*riḍḍa*) should be overthrown; however, he drastically differed with him in terms of how this change was to be brought about. Thus, as both Abd-Allah (1983, 126) and Weismann (1993, 620) point out, Ḥawwa parted ways with Ḥadīd over what he took to be Ḥadīd’s impulsive waging of unconditional war against the ʾAsad regime. Weismann writes, “[t]he core of the dispute was not the struggle itself, as both believed in its necessity, but its timing. When the confrontation with the regime began to escalate, it appeared that Ḥadīd’s position was to prevail. Hawwa joined the struggle, perhaps because he believed that the time to start a rebellion had come and that the movement was ready for such a move. It is more likely, however, that he was drawn into it by the enthusiastic younger members of the movement, who were no longer willing to wait. The [1982] massacre at Hamah proved that it was Hawwa’s analysis of Syrian political realities which was correct. It also proved his failure as a *daʿiya* (herald) to lead the Muslim Brethren movement in the way of moderation that this analysis called for. Therefore, the defeat of the Islamic movement in Syria was also the personal defeat of Saʿid Hawwa” (620).
lands of Islam for its own gain, the consequences of which, Ḥawwa observed, were divisions within the Muslim world and the domination of its countries by military dictatorships (Weismann 1997, 134). While the extent of corruption (fāsad) plaguing Muslim societies and their leaders varied from country to country, it was found in all. All governments and most Muslim leaders had become enemies of Islam, with the masses (jamāhīr) obsequiously following behind (Ḥawwa 1977, 7). This was of particular concern because, Ḥawwa notes, the modern state had come to hold sway over every aspect of life: education, instruction, the economy, the army, society, politics, intellectual life, and culture (396). This resulted not only in Muslims who were ignorant of their own religion but also in a lack of political engagement by Muslim publics who failed to see any direct connection between their faith and politics, an educational failure made only worse by quiescent ‘ulamāʾ and Ṣūfīs alike.

In diagnosing this condition which he thought characterized much of the Muslim world, Ḥawwa avoided using the concept of jāhilīyya more associated with Quṭb and instead employed the legal concept of ridda (apostasy).9 This concept may be traced back to the period following the death of the prophet Muḥammad when a number of tribes, upon learning of his death, considered themselves free from any obligation to his successor. According to Ḥawwa, it was because these tribes had accepted Islam and joined its community that their attempts to withdraw

---

9 Islamist thinker Abū al-Aʿlā Mawdūdī (d. 1979), founder of Pakistan’s Jamaʿat-e-Islami, developed a modern conception of the term “jāhilīyya” by using it analogically to bridge pre-Islamic beliefs and practices, such as rampant tribalism and idolatry, with modern forms of the same which he said included atheism, racism, nationalism, and injustice (Jackson 2011, 157). The concept came to play an even larger role in Quṭb’s thought, especially during his time in prison. Quṭb used this category to identify not only those forms of life which he believed overtly opposed Islam, but also to designate a “false consciousness” which plagued many professed Muslims and prevented them from acquiring the truth about the world around them. For Quṭb, this served as the only explanation for the failures of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the continued success of Gamal ʿAbd al-Nāṣir’s regime (Rahnema 2005, 161-62, 171-72).
were deemed by the first caliph Abū Bakr (d. 12/634) to warrant the charges of both apostasy and treason (Weisman 1997, 135). As a result, Abū Bakr waged the “Wars of Apostasy” (Hurūb al-ridda) which returned the Arabian peninsula to Muslim control.

Ḥawwa believed this concept to be more adequate to the task of ideological analysis. It was more precise than jāhilīyya simply because this term was used to designate the state of ignorance that characterized pre-Islamic societies, a condition that could no longer apply to Muslim countries (135). Ridda, on the other hand, more accurately captured the condition throughout the Muslim world wherein those who once professed belief in Islam now engaged in behavior that demonstrated their abandonment of the faith. Perhaps most importantly, the concept of ridda enabled Ḥawwa to focus the energies of reform inward towards those guilty of ridda (murtaddūn). In Ḥawwa’s conceptual paradigm, the category of jāhilīyya was constituted by non-Muslims who adhered to ideological worldviews devised by the human mind while that of ridda comprised Muslims who adopted those ideologies at the expense of Islam. Thus, in contrast to Quṭb, Ḥawwa claimed that only non-Muslim societies could be considered jāhilī. Moreover, because the murtaddūn represented a greater danger to the integrity of the umma, they were to be fought prior to the world of jāhilīyya (136).¹⁰

It was those who took up this struggle that Ḥawwa considered most praiseworthy for they recognized the practical commitments of their faith and formed the vanguard of Islamic activism.

¹⁰ Ḥawwa seemed to realize the severity of this prognosis and added this caveat: “In spite of what has been said, we do not find most of the societies belonging to the countries of the Muslim world guilty of heresy because if we did, we would regard them all as dar harb. We prefer to wait with this verdict despite the increase in the number of murtaddun and despite their domination, because of the religious laws that such a verdict would entail ... we will be content with regarding them as societies in error (fasiqa), whose affairs are controlled by murtaddun, deviators, heretics and hypocrites (munafiqun), who are deepening the deviation and lead the Muslims towards complete ridda” (Weismann quoting Ḥawwa 1997, 137).
in order to further the Islamic revival (al-ṣahwah al-Islāmīyya). Citing Q. 9:122 which declares, “there should separate from every division of them a group (ṭāʾifa) [remaining] to obtain understanding in the religion and warn their people…,” Ḥawwa stated that these “soldiers of God” (jund Allah) had been set apart to instruct their fellow believers in word and deed on the proper path of God (fī sabīl Allah) (1977, 363-64, 374). This was the jihād of education (taʿlīm), and it was crucial that this jihād begin with oneself, in terms of both exoteric (taʿlīm) and esoteric education (tarbīya), for these serve as the necessary resources for the cultivation of a “humane personality” (al-shakhṣīyyah al-insānīyyah) (29-33). It was upon this foundation that an effective organization (tanẓīm) would be built that achieved the goals of jihād which included establishing an Islamic state in every Muslim country, unifying the umma, and reviving a global caliphate (32).

Ḥawwa conceived of jihād in terms of the three modes tradition of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” Citing the tradition of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), he spoke of three jihāds: jihād by the heart (qalb), jihād by the tongue (lisān), and jihād by the hand (yad) (364). Just as in the classical tradition, they ascended in order of praiseworthiness with the execution of the duty by hand earning the most acclaim while doing so by heart engendered the least. Ḥawwa even went so far as to speak of a correlation (tilāzīmā) between the discourses of jihād and “commanding right and forbidding wrong” such that they supported one another (364). Generally speaking, jihād bil-yad involved an external war directed towards non-Muslims which was to be conducted according to the norms of classical jihād and included attacking non-Muslim lands, defending Muslim lands when attacked, and retaking occupied territory (380, 389). Ḥawwa, however, postponed this external war almost indefinitely, stipulating that it was
not to be carried out until the return of the caliph, the achievement of unity among the umma, and the creation of industry which parallels that found in the advanced countries of the world (388).

While jihād bil-yad was aimed at those outside of the Muslim world (dār al-harb), jihād bil-nafs (jihād of the self) took place within the lands of Islam and broadly included that of the tongue and hand as well as another category of jihād, jihād al-siyāsī (political jihād). The three modes tradition employed in Ḥawwa’s conception of jihād bil-nafs concerned itself with “commanding right and forbidding wrong” in relation to fellow believers, while jihād al-siyāsī denoted a notion of the duty more political in orientation. In some societies, this latter type might take the form of shaping public opinion or providing advice (nasīha) to the governing authorities while in other contexts where the political leadership is comprised of apostates (murtadīn), colonizers (mustʿamarīn), or oppressors (ẓālamīn), more radical action to remove these regimes would be required (389, 393). Specifically, Ḥawwa called on Muslims to uproot sects (tawʿayf) such as the Bāṭinīyyin, Bahāʾís (Bahāʾīyyin), and the Ahmadiyya (Qādīānīyyin) as well as communists (shuyuʿīyyin), nationalists (qawmīyyin), and those who advocated the separation of religion (dīn) and state (dawla) (1977, 386). As Weismann points out, though Ḥawwa mentioned neither the al-Asad regime nor the ‘Alawī community, it is not difficult to discern that these served as his primary foes. Although the term bāṭinīyya was historically reserved in Sunnī heresiography for the Ismāʿīlī Fāṭamids, in the modern Syrian context, it was also used in reference to the ‘Alawīs who were perceived as sharing a family resemblance with Ismāʿīlīsm.11

11 As mentioned in chapter one, Ismāʿīlī Fāṭamid’s notion of religious authority was based on the Shīʿite concept of the infallible imām and grounded in a Neoplatonic cosmology and its application of an allegorical system of interpretation to the Qurʾān, Sunna, and Islamic law. This hermeneutic was epistemically predicated on the distinction between the exoteric, or outer (zāhir), truths and the esoteric, or inner (bāṭin), truths of revelation, to which access was achieved only via the imām. As Mitha (2001) observes, this conception of authority stood in stark contrast to that embedded within the Sunnī legal tradition.
This, coupled with the Baʿath embrace of Western-styled secularism and the heavy hand with which the party ruled, led Ḥawwa to deem confrontation with the al-Asad regime as inevitable (Weismann 1997, 151-52). The war against such groups, Ḥawwa asserted, was to be given the utmost priority for they constituted the greatest threat to the umma, and thus it was incumbent on each and every Muslim (farḍ ‘ayn) to actively participate in or support such campaigns, as in the case of defensive war (1977, 380).

While Ḥawwa brought attention to the circumstances in which this more radical form of jihād al-siyāsa was required, he spent far more time discussing the duty to “command right and forbid wrong” in conditions which did not require regime change. Ḥawwa divided such regimes into the categories of either fair Islamic states (dūwal Islāmiyya ‘ādila) or corrupt Islamic states (dūwal Islāmiyya munḥarifa) (389). In either type of state, only peaceful struggle through daʿwa was permitted; although, as we will see in regards to this latter category, there was more leeway to take action in order to ensure adherence to the law.

Ḥawwa’s discussion of jihād under both forms of political authority begins with the jihād of the tongue (bil-lisān). Citing al-Ghazālī, Ḥawwa stated that one should carry out this form of the duty by exhortation (waʿẓ) as well as through the provision of reminders (tathkīrāt), perhaps comprised of stories of the pious ancestors (salaf) (365). This should not be done with anger or violence but rather with kindness and compassion for the correction of a fellow Muslim with the intention of humiliation (ithlāl) constituted the evil that was worst in the self (al-munkar aqbhu fī nafs) (365).12 It was possible that the performance of this duty might even take the form of

---

12 Cook notes Şūfī elements in the concern with the inflation of the ego (nafs) found in this admonition from al-Ghazālī (2000, 460). In his discussion of exhortation (waʿẓ), al-Ghazālī warned of the danger of being puffed up with one’s sense of superior knowledge, an attitude that was a greater wrong
argument (ḥuja) which therefore entailed knowledge of the unique ideological challenges to be found in the country where one lived.

If exhortation failed to bring about repentance (tawba) and the admission of wrongdoing in one’s fellow believer, then one was permitted to escalate matters through jihād of the hand (bil-yad). In his discussion of how one should comport themselves at this stage, Ḫawwa drew nearly verbatim from al-Ghazālī’s discussion of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” in his Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn). Agreeing with al-Ghazālī, Ḫawwa declared that one does not require the opinion (rāy) of the imām before engaging in aggressive action against other believers; however, this was to proceed through the observation of the principle of minimal escalation (tadrīj) (383-84). Therefore, when informing and exhorting brought about no satisfactory result, one was to progress according to the following schema: 1) physical action (al-taghyīr bil-yad); 2) intimidation and threat (al-tahdīd waʾl-takhwīf); 3) direct assault (mubāsharat al-ḍarb); and 4) the use of armed helpers (aʿwān) to perform the duty.13 Recall that this schema mirrors that found in al-Ghazālī’s account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” previously discussed in the chapter on this duty in classical Islamic thought. As such, the elaboration of the duty contained few examples of what its performance might look like in twentieth-century Syria; however, Ḫawwa was able to extrapolate basic principles to guide believers as they carried it out.

---

13 With a few exceptions, I follow Cook’s translation of this account given by al-Ghazālī which Ḫawwa here liberally quotes (2000, 440-41). For the passage in al-Ghazālī’s Revival, see his Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn (Al-Qāhirah: Lajnat Nashr al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1937-38), 1186-1282. Interestingly, Cook refers to Ḫawwa’s reliance on al-Ghazālī as “striking,” thinking it more likely that a “fundamentalist” like Ḫawwa would have turned instead to Ibn Taymiyya. However, considering Ḫawwa’s own Sūfī inclinations and his emphasis on tarbīya, his use of al-Ghazālī makes perfect sense (fn. 14, 508).
For al-Ghazālī, physical action entailed the destruction of offending objects, such as musical instruments or casks of wine, as well as the use of force to remove someone from a place they are not permitted. Such action, however, was not to be taken if one could persuade the offender to take the action themselves. While this type of physical action might entail bodily harm of some kind, this was not the objective. However, this changed when one was forced beyond this to levels involving assault. Of course, it was vital that one begin with the threat of assault by imparting such warnings as, “[s]top that, or I’ll break your head!” If violence was required, then one was to proceed without weapons by inflicting blows with the hand or the foot. If the use of weapons was called for, then this was permitted as long as it did not lead to disorder (fitna). The final level involved the collection of armed helpers when one could not accomplish the duty alone. Al-Ghazālī noted the disagreements over whether one was to seek the ruler’s permission before endeavoring to gather such a group, but he concluded that the performance of the duty at this level without the authority’s permission was only a logical extension of previous levels where such permission was not required. In general, it was uncommon for matters to reach such an impasse, but the responsibility was there in principle (384-86).

For Ḥawwa, the contours of this type of jihād bil-yad depended on the status of the state in which one lived. That is, the duty took shape differently in a fair Islamic state (dawla Islāmiyya ʿādila) as opposed to a corrupt Islamic state (dawla Islāmiyya munḥarifa) (389). In a fair Islamic state, one found leaders who were committed Muslims as well as a methodological apparatus (minḥaj) undergirding the government which stemmed from Islam. Moreover, such a state worked to establish Islam both within and outside of its territory. Those governments which fit this description, Ḥawwa declared, were to receive the support and obedience of their Muslim citizens (390). Although Ḥawwa did not explicitly say so, one assumes that such a state would
also possess bodies devoted to “commanding right and forbidding wrong” such as is found in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; however, Ḥawwa would continue to insist that the execution of this duty remains the responsibility of every believer.

In a corrupt Islamic state, the manifestations of deviation (inhirāf) were many: the rulers were unjust or corrupt, its governing bodies were incompetent, and there was no real commitment to shārīʿa, both domestically and in terms to foreign policy (391). In such states, it was even more imperative that jihād bil-yad be carried out. If this was not permitted, Ḥawwa asked, what was to be done? In response, he declared that, “our permanent position is that in the face of every deviation, we will engage in protest and the giving of advice (naṣīha)…” (392). It was incumbent on every citizen to perform the duty if the state did not establish the practice; one should not be deceived if the state tells you otherwise. In our era, Ḥawwa observed, there have developed many state agencies; however, the Muslim community was best equipped to organize in order to confront corruption (fasād) in all its forms.

Therefore, it was incumbent on believers to create an organization for conducting jihād by the hand (tanẓīm ʿamaliyyat al-jihād biʾl-yad) in order to target the wrongs of individuals (i.e. musical instruments, nude pictures, liquor, the flaunting of female sexuality), but in “commanding right and forbidding wrong,” they should avoid collision with the state (391). At times this duty assumed more political overtones. This included a range of activities from monitoring the organs of the press to seeking positions of influence in government ministries (392). On a more fundamental level, jihād of the tongue and of education aided in shaping public opinion (raʿy ʿāma) so as to pressure the political authority to govern in line with Islam. For
Ḥawwa, these forms of jihād by the tongue and hand either in lieu of or opposition to state authorities collectively constituted jihād al-siyāsī.

**Ṣūfism, Tarbīya, and the Cultivation of Virtue in Ḥawwa’s Activist Vision**

In order to create a successful movement to “command right and forbid wrong” in the ways just discussed, Ḥawwa believed that one must attend to ethical and spiritual education for without proper interior formation, the dispositions and character necessary for socio-political activism would not be attained. A successful contemporary Islamic movement (al-haraka al-Islāmiyya al-muʿāṣira) thus depended on Ṣūfī spiritual education (al-tarbīya al-ṣawfīyya), both intellectually (fikran) and behaviorally (salūkan). Ḥawwa stated that one finds support for this in Ḥasan al-Bannā’ (d. 1949) who taught both that the Muslim Brotherhood’s most important element was its Ṣūfī nature and that the characteristics of daʿwa were in truth Ṣūfī (1979, 12).

This was especially vital because in the contemporary Muslim world, there was a receding of both spiritual education and mastery of the religious sciences (taʿlīm) (1977, 9). Ṣūfism, Ḥawwa declared, provided the needed resources for spiritual education and ethical formation because it was the key to the science of ethics (ʿilm al-ikhlāq) (117).

Such an embrace of Ṣūfism might seem counterintuitive for someone who also considered himself a member of the Salafī movement, which has often been characterized as having an antagonistic relationship with Ṣūfī thought and practice. Even though much of the Salafī movement after Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) came to hold increasingly negative views towards Ṣūfism, it is important to recall that his mentor and one of the founders of modern

---

14 It should be noted that Ḥawwa refers to al-Bannā’ as “teacher” (ustādh) (1979, 12).
Salafism, Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905), was himself a Ṣūfī.\(^{15}\) Moreover, ‘Abduh’s conception of the “pious forbearers” (al-salaf al-sāliḥ) drastically differed from that of Riḍā in that ‘Abduh included all those figures who collectively constituted the major legal, theological, and philosophical currents in Islam.\(^{16}\) Riḍā, on the other hand, confined his definition of salaf to that of the first generation of Islam, the prophet Muḥammad and his Companions (ṣaḥābah) which extended the comprehensiveness of the concept of ijtihād (independent judgment) and diminished reliance on tradition as it had developed, for example, in the legal schools (Weismann 1997, 138). Riḍā’s successors, especially the followers of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792), took this understanding of salaf to its extreme conclusion and soon deemed all Islamic history with the exception of its first generation devoid of any significant value.

With an understanding of the salaf more in line with ‘Abduh, Ḥawwa sought to counteract the narrow definitions of Riḍā and his inheritors. He wrote,

> Those who call for the abandonment of all that the ‘ulamā’ of the Muslims have said for generations are destroying the entire culture of a nation, on behalf of which millions of intellects have labored, and which the experience of the ages has brought into maturity. Those who bring into doubt the value of this tradition are not equal to the most humble of those who have contributed to it …. Does religion remain for a man when he despises the best among the ‘ulamā’ of this nation and regards himself as better than they are? (1977, 117-18)\(^{17}\)

Ḥawwa called for a more liberal view of tradition here primarily in order to oppose the Salafī tendency to reject Ṣūfīsm. For Ḥawwa, commitment to the salaf entailed commitment to Ṣūfīsm; however, this embrace did not mean an endorsement of all forms of Ṣūfī thought and practice carte blanche. Rather, Ḥawwa declared the need for a “Salafī Ṣūfīsm” (al-taṣawwuf al-salafī)

\(^{15}\) For more on ‘Abduh’s Ṣūfism and the attempts by later Salafis to suppress this aspect of his thought, see Scharbrodt 2007.

\(^{16}\) For more on the different definitions of salaf held by Riḍā and ‘Abduh, see Hourani 1983, 230.

\(^{17}\) For this particular passage, I follow the translation of Weismann 1997, 139.
which avoided the excesses of both mysticism and the law (1979, 12). Standard Salafī critiques of Şūfī groups included their purported worship of saints (ʾawliyāʾ) as well as socio-political quietism. Ḥawwa opposed these elements as well, especially the latter one. In response to charges of quietism, he pointed to the revolutions of Sheikh Saʿīd al-Kurḍī of the Naqshbandī in Turkey, Sheikh Shāmil of the Naqshbandī in Turkistan, and the Sanūsī movement in Libya (6). Ḥawwa also rejected those aspects of Şūfism which exceeded the bounds of theology and jurisprudence. Therefore, those who believed they have achieved an “inner” consciousness of God and thus no longer were in need of the law or those who begged their order’s saints for personal favors all had transgressed the limits established by God (67-68). It was vital that one confine one’s understanding and practice of Şūfism to the boundaries fixed by the Qurʾān and Sunna (12). In this way, Şūfism supplemented fiqh and fiqh governed Şūfism for the end of the scholars (ʿulamāʾ) and Şūfism was one (50).

In articulating this complementary relationship between Şūfism and fiqh, Ḥawwa joined a long tradition of reconciliation between orthodoxy and Şūfī thought and practice, which found its clearest expression in al-Ghazālī and which has been revived since the reform movements of the eighteenth century (Weismann 1997, 140). This was perhaps most evident in Ḥawwa’s own invocation of al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyya as the two most important ethical schools (madrasatīn ikhlāqītīn) in the history of Islam (1977, 116). He was quick to point out that Ibn Taymiyya, who was often presented by Salafīs as condemning Şūfism in toto, wrote sympathetically about Şūfism (1979, 8). And we have already seen the degree to which Ḥawwa’s notion of jihād

---

18 In fact, Ibn Taymiyya expressed not only sympathy but admiration for the Qādirīyya Şūfī order which counted members of the conservative Ḥanbalī legal school among its adherents. Paul Heck writes, “It should not be forgotten, however, that some of the most respected names of orthodox Islam had Sufi associations, including the figure whose writings inspire many a reformist movement today, Ibn
depended on al-Ghazālī’s account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” This reliance ran deeper, however, when one notes how both Ḥawwa and al-Ghazālī called for an Islam that conceived of taṣawwuf and its attention to ethical formation and spiritual education (tarbīya) as a necessary supplement to ‘ilm (knowledge), and ‘ilm as a necessary filter for taṣawwuf. Among the moderns, Ḥawwa looked most often to al-Bannāʾ as one who took the insights provided by al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyya and applied them to the creation of modern Islamic movements. Ḥawwa believed strongly that there was much to learn from al-Bannāʾ (14).

Through Ṣūfism, one was enabled to embark on the journey to God. This journey involved struggle (muḥādha), but through this struggle, with guidance and the grace of God (tawfīq Allah), one gained access to God-consciousness (taqwā) (1979, 109). One passed through stages on this journey that began with adherence to the basic creed (shahāda) and moved through observing the basic pillars of Islam to gaining an awareness of the spiritual (rūḥīyya) aspects of these devotional acts. Beyond these levels there existed a stage which consisted of attention to the four pillars of struggle, including isolation (ʿazīla), observing silence (ṣamt), dhikr/dawn recitation of prayer (sahar), and fasting (jūʿ) (111). Ḥawwa was quick to point out that in this final stage, the role played by the spiritual guide (murshid) became vital, but he also acknowledged the abuses which sometimes characterized the master-disciple relationship. He therefore counseled that one should know the boundaries of the allegiance (bayʿa) between the

---

Taymiyya (d. 1328), who, while critical of certain Sufi practices, himself belonged to the Qādiriyya, a Sufi group whose founder, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166), still revered as preeminent saint, was an accomplished scholar of the law, identifying with its highly revelation-centered Hanbali school” (2007, 7). While Ibn Taymiyya’s admiration for the Qādiriyya is not in dispute, the same cannot be said of his actual membership in the order. For more on this, see Michel 1981, and for more generally on Ibn Taymiyya and the Qādiriyya order, see Makdisi 1973.
master (murshid) and disciple (murīd), even going so far as to state that there might be situations in which one should discard the laws governing this relationship (122).

In his discussion of the role of the spirit (rūḥ), heart (qalb), intellect (ʿaql), and self (nafs) in the ethical psychology of Ṣūfism, Ḥawwa identified both the reasons for the difficulty of this journey as well as what must be done to overcome these obstacles. In the current age, Ḥawwa declared, the human heart was prone to a number of diseases such as unrestrained desire (shahwa), whimsy (nazwa), and materialism (mādiyya) (13). As a result, the heart succumbed to the power of the lower-self (nafs) and increasingly strayed from the path of God. In order to stave off these diseases of the heart, wayward desires and impulses would have to be brought under the control of the intellect. According to Ḥawwa, lawful reason (al-ʿaql al-sharʿi) was the rightful ruler of the individual and served as the seat of the heart (maqar al-qalb) (42). In order to subordinate unrestrained desire to sovereign reason, one was required to strengthen their will (irāda) through a range of activities so that it became disciplined in all things. This process of training (riyaḍāt) in order to purify oneself (tazkiyyat al-nafs) might begin with greater adherence to the law but eventually would come to include other more advanced devotional activities which Ṣūfism prescribed as a means of overcoming sin and attaining such virtues as sincerity (ikhlās) and spiritual benevolence (iḥsān) (43).

These activities might include such practices as observing silence (ṣamt), fellowship (suḥba), and meditative remembrance (dhikr). Through silence, one came to refine the tongue which, Ḥawwa declared, was one of the most important matters in Islam. Citing both Q. 4:114 which speaks of the dangers of gossip as well as select passages from al-Ghazālī’s Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihyaʿ ʿulūm al-dīn), Ḥawwa warned against the calamities of tongue (afāt al-lisān) which include pride (fakhr) and quarreling (khiṣām). By periodically observing silence,
one was able to attain “disciplined speech” (al-kalām al-munadabīṭ); moreover, if one neglected this practice too often, it then became increasingly difficult to weigh one’s words before speaking (114).

Fellowship with others who elected to struggle on the path towards greater character and God-consciousness provided a community that was conducive to spiritual progress. The most important relationship in this community was that between the novice (murīd) and the guide (murshid) who functioned as a source of spiritual insight and discipline. For Ḥawwa, this relationship provided the novice with an opportunity to engage in that activity which was vital in the formation of character: service (khidma). Although considered by some to be beneath them, serving one’s spiritual guide (and other elders) brought with it experiences of lowliness (thila) which therefore left the residue of humility (tawāḍaʿa) in the hearts of those who put others before themselves (91).

Of the spiritual disciplines, it was perhaps dhikr (meditative remembrance) which Ḥawwa believed to be the most effective. He stated that dhikr was the first knowledge Muḥammad raised from the earth, and as such, it served as the most important science in Ṣūfism and in Muslim life more generally (232). Ḥawwa adduced further evidence for the ways in which dhikr was intrinsic to devotional life in Islam by citing Qur’ānic verses such as 20:18 which speaks of the need to “establish prayer for [God’s] remembrance.” Sharing the elements of bowing (rukūʿa) and prostration (sujūd) with prayer prayer (ṣalāt) and sometimes involving an entire night engaged in the silent recitation of the divine names, dhikr not only provided the means of drawing near to God, but it also enabled one to overcome the vices of arrogance (kibr) and vanity (ghurūr) (230-32).
For Ḥawwa, these and other ritual and devotional practices played vital roles in the process of character formation by serving as techniques for disciplining the body and dispositions in order that the necessary virtues might be acquired and the ultimate objective of God-consciousness attained. While this process functioned as an effective means of enhancing one’s devotional life, Ḥawwa believed that the virtues it produced also prepared one for those social practices and duties which were an essential part of his activist program. Moreover, these practices, which included daʿwa and commanding and forbidding, served as opportunities for training the desires and augmenting those virtues. The ritual and devotional practices discussed above sought to habituate the individual in such a way that vices such as pride, arrogance, and vanity were subdued and virtues such as humility were cultivated. Ḥawwa considered these and other virtues crucial when engaging in public exchange and interaction.

Thus, when performing daʿwa which might include a range of activities from informing (bayān) to admonition (waʿẓ) to rebuke (taʿnīf), it was crucial that one do so with patience (ṣabr) and forbearance (tahamal). Moreover, prudence (ḥikma) served a paramount purpose in this endeavor where contexts differed as some situations called for escalation while others required that one abandon their task (200-01). And challenging the perception that Ṣūfīs were socially apathetic and therefore aloof when it came to social engagement, Ḥawwa sought to bring attention to the neglected duty of commanding right and forbidding, which, as seen above, was reflected in his near verbatim appropriation of al-Ghazālī’s influential discussion of it in the *Revival*. Though written in the fifth/eleventh century, the comprehensive and populist nature of al-Ghazālī’s account led it to eclipse most others, and it continued to shape understandings of the obligation well into the modern period, especially among early modern and modern revivalist movements. This duty, Ḥawwa wrote, was vital because humans are social creatures who attain...
individuality only within society, and therefore, public norms should reflect those enshrined in the divine law. Commanding and forbidding stemmed from a number of Qur’anic texts including Q. 103 which warned that humankind was lost “except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.” Ģawwa noted that this verse spoke not only to the imperative nature of the duty, but also to the manner in which it was to be carried out. That is, its proper performance required both rightness (ḥaq) and patience (ṣabr) (201-02). This was crucial for the execution of the duty might entail the use of physical force to confront and stop those engaged in illicit activities. Though one was to proceed by the principle of minimal escalation (tadrīj), if the wrong doer failed to desist after a warning and admonition, one could then escalate to the use of physical action (al-taghyīr bil-yad) or even, if the situation were dire enough, the use of armed helpers (aʿwān) (1977, 383-84). As mentioned above, Ģawwa adopted this paradigm from al-Ghazālī who also stipulated that, while the duty could be carried out by any legally competent (mukallaf) adult Muslim with the capability to perform it, the ideal set of qualities included knowledge (ʿilm), pious devotion (wara’), and good character (ḥusn al-khuluq) (1937–38, 2:1234). As we have seen, this focus on good character as a vital prerequisite for the just and virtuous execution of the duty was one shared by Ģawwa as well.

Conclusion

As I have sought to demonstrate above, when we place Ģawwa’s account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” within the larger context of his conception of Islamic activism and a successful Islamic movement, informed as it is by his “Salafī Şūfism,” it becomes evident that methodologies which attempt to present Islamist thought and practice as thoroughly
modern in character fall short in analytically significant ways. Although he might share the goal of creating an Islamic state with a number of Islamist groups, the methods by which he recommended achieving this stood apart. This resulted from the social, religious, and political currents of his time and place, as shaped as they were by the rising modernist Salafī movements in the Arab world as well as by the continued prominence of the Naqşbandī Şūfī order in his hometown of Ḥamāh. As we have seen, Ḥawwa’s interpretation and use of the vocabulary of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” was closely tied to that found in classical Islam, especially in its reliance on al-Ghazālī. Still, he adapted the discourse’s three modes tradition in light of the social and political challenges he faced in the Syria of his day. This most clearly manifested itself in his conception of a jihād by hand (bil-yad) waged in order to overthrow murtad regimes such as that led by the Ba‘ath. However, just as Ḥawwa sought to chart a middle way between the excesses of Salafism and Şūfism, so too did he seek to find a path between the unyielding violent jihād against al-Asad so desired by Ḥadīd and the commitment to non-violent resistance by al-‘Aṭār. While he believed that a war with al-Asad was inevitable, he also insisted on the importance of careful planning and organizational development, a significant part of which required attention to tarbīya.

Ḥawwa’s conception of tarbīya was informed by an approach to Islam best characterized as a reformist middle way between the extremes of law and mysticism, and as such, ‘ilm and taṣawwuf were considered parts of a greater coherent whole. His use of the term “Salafi Şūfism” (al-taṣawwuf al-salafi) was meant to capture this paradigm and thus subvert those perspectives which viewed these two elements as standing in opposition to one another. Rather, in their respective attention to both the exterior (Salafism) and the interior (Şūfism), they were best understood in complementary terms. This complementarity manifested itself in Ḥawwa’s theory
of spiritual and character formation which conceived ritual and devotional practice as outward activities meant to discipline the body and therefore train the dispositions for the purpose of cultivating that character and those virtues necessary for God-consciousness (taqwa). This was evident in his discussion of Şūfī ethical psychology wherein unwieldy desires were to be brought under the domain of lawful reason which served as the seat of the heart and sovereign of the individual. One accomplished this by training the desires and purifying oneself through adherence to Islamic law and participation in Şūfī devotional exercises such as observing silence and performing dhikr. In this way, the practice of the law along with the ritual and treatment of adāb and akhlāq provided by Şūfism function interdependently and dialectically, so that while internal intentions and dispositions guide external actions, external actions correspondingly shape internal intentions and dispositions. Moreover, this takes place not simply on an individual level but a social one as well because the reality of human sociality dictates that virtue and character formation have a public component.

For Ḥawwa, this public component took the form not only of the adāb of dress, travel, and table manners, but also of socio-political activism, even to the point of using force to bring about regime change within Baʿathist controlled Syria. In this and other aspects of his revolutionary program, one finds the imprint of modernity, to be sure. However, in appropriating the notion of ritual as a technology of the self in which the individual and the social operate interdependently, Ḥawwa also drew on Islamic ethical traditions shaped by Şūfī ethical psychology as well as Aristotelian and Platonic doctrines of the soul. In these traditions,

---

19 For a short but insightful discussion of Şūfī ethical psychology, see Schimmel 2011, 187-93. For more on the Platonic and Aristotelian influences in the Islamic ethical literature of such figures as Ibn Miskawayh, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), see Leaman 2001, Sherif, 1975, and Fakhry 2001.
broadly speaking, the lower domains of the soul characterized by the irascible (ghaḍabiyya) and appetitive (shahwiyya) faculties were to be brought under the control of the rational (‘aqliyya) faculty by way of a process of habituation which then produced the requisite character and virtues. Though the place of divine aid in this process varied among members of this tradition, all agreed that external actions and bodily practices served to shape internal attitudes and dispositions. Moreover, this process entailed a social dimension which was reflected in the attention paid to perfecting one’s adāb in any number of public activities. What resulted was a model of ethical formation which emphasizes the cultivation of virtue, not simply through ritual practice, but also through socio-political exchange and interaction.

In his pleading for patience and emphasis on tarbīya in order to properly create and sustain an effective Islamic movement as well as in his “Salafi Ṣūfism,” Ḥawwa shared much with Yassine, whom we now consider. As we will find, Yassine, like Ḥawwa, adhered to an understanding of the salaf which entailed Ṣūfism, and Yassine, again like Ḥawwa, looked to al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyya, and al-Bannāʾ as precursors to the type of Islam he sought to advocate. Nonetheless, we will also discover differences between the two in their use of the “commanding right and forbidding wrong” discourse as well as in their views regarding the role of violence in effecting change. While Yassine explored questions which historically marked the discourse such as whether the duty was best understood as an individual (farḍ ’ayn) or a collective one (farḍ kifāya), ultimately we find in his thought an interpretation of commanding and forbidding with a more tenuous connection to its classical forms. This is evident not only in its emphasis on creating a vanguard (ṭalīʿa) to effect socio-political change, but also in the concern it consistently expressed for the spiritual dimensions undergirding the duty’s performance. To be sure, a
concern for spiritual formation as a necessary propaedeutic for activism characterized Ḥawwa’s thought; however, Yassine’s thought appeared to be more attuned to it.
CHAPTER 4


“How can you expect those who fail to observe the Night and Day Schedule of the Believer to ascend up to the station of remembering God and imploring Him humbly … and asking Him constantly the greatest of rewards, that of contemplating His Face for all eternity? Our initial request to God to grant us the greatest reward of contemplating His Face eternally may be slackened, and our determination to worship Him earnestly may be undermined, if we do not have the determination to maintain the spiritual ties that link us to Him through the daily wirds. Only then may we talk of exerting efforts to serve God’s cause in social and political activism.”

— ‘Abd al-Salām Yassine

It has been reported that when Moroccan Islamist ‘Abd al-Salām Yassine (d. 2012) sent a copy of his 1974 open letter, “Islam or the Deluge: An Open Letter to the King of Morocco” (al-Islām aw al-ṭawfān: risāla mafiṭūha ila malik al-Maghreb), to King Hassan II, he prepared a burial shroud for what he expected would be his imminent demise (Munson 1993, 163). In this letter, Yassine called for the king to depart from his slavish imitation of Western political and economic practices and to repent and reform his government in an Islamic manner. In writing this letter, Yassine sought to revive the classical genre of advice (naṣīha) literature as well as the Moroccan tradition of the righteous man of God speaking truth to an unjust ruler. The letter also

---


2 Henry Munson uses this mythic pattern of the “righteous man of God” to critique the earlier ethnographic work of Clifford Geertz who, Munson argues, failed to situate the symbolic system of Moroccan Islam within the wider networks of Morocco’s political and economic institutions. This led Geertz to claim that the monarchy is “the key institution in the Moroccan religious system.” As Munson seeks to demonstrate in his analysis of Yassine and others who have claimed the mantle of the righteous man of God, such a conclusion not only marginalizes other traditions in Moroccan Islam, it also fails to account for the coercive ways in which the monarchy has maintained its grip on power. Thus, Munson concludes, it is “true that we need to study symbols in terms of how they are actually used by real people
cited Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 148/767), founder of the eponymously named school of Islamic law (sharīʿa), as a moral exemplar who not only provided advice to the rulers of his day, but who also urged scholars (ʿulamāʾ) to perform the duty of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.”

Alongside the naṣīha genre, the duty to “command right and forbid wrong” (al-amr biʾl-maʿrūf waʾl-nahy ʿan al-munkar) has been appropriated throughout Islamic history for the purpose of holding one’s fellow believers and acknowledged religious and political authorities accountable. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which Yassine’s understanding of the social practice of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” shaped his approach to socio-political activism. As has been discussed, discourse on this duty in the pre-modern periods sought to decipher individual rights and responsibilities towards fellow members of the community; however, in the modern era it displayed a marked interest in creating organizations and movements in order to address the external challenges of colonialism along with the internal ones of political corruption and what was perceived as a societal erosion of Islamic norms. In keeping with this pattern, we find in Yassine an interpretation of the “commanding right and forbidding wrong” discourse with a more tenuous connection to its classical forms in its emphasis on creating a vanguard (ṭalīʿah) to effect socio-political change, yet he too explored the same questions which historically marked the discourse such as whether the duty was best understood as an individual duty (fardʿ ʿayn) or a collective one (fardʿ kifāya). What perhaps most characterized Yassine’s conception of this duty was his fundamental concern with spiritual and ethical formation (tarbīya) which he argued was essential for the cultivation of those virtues which were most needed to engage in the socio-political activism he advocated. In many ways living their everyday lives. Such study, however, does not preclude the analysis of structure. On the contrary, it entails it” (1993, 182).
this resulted from his Salafi- and Ṣūfī-inspired thought and practice which set him apart in a public space characterized by multiple actors, including both the monarchy and oppositional movements, all of whom claimed Islamic legitimacy. In fact, in his 1998 treatise, *Spiritual Benevolence (Al-Iḥsān)*, Yassine referred to Ḥawwa’s “Salafi Ṣūfism” (*al-taṣawwuf al-salafi*) approvingly and presented it as a model to be emulated (1:32).³

In scholarship on Islamism, a Ṣūfī-Salafi divide has often been perpetuated wherein the call for a return to the “forbearers” (*salaf*) amounted to a rejection of Ṣūfism understood in terms of its alleged heterodox indulgence in mystical antinomianism and political quietism (Weismann 2001a). Of course, this was true for some forms of Salafi thought, such as that of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792), but not all forms. Even though many of the Salafi movements after Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) came to hold increasingly negative views towards Ṣūfism, it is important to recall that his mentor and one of the founders of modern Salafism, Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905), was himself a Ṣūfī.⁴ Moreover, as we have seen, prominent Islamist figures such as al-Bannā’ and Ḥawwa considered their Salafi and Ṣūfī commitments to be complimentary rather than contradictory. Yassine too argued that the Salafi and Ṣūfī elements of his thought functioned harmoniously by addressing the interior and exterior dimensions of Muslim life, all the while avoiding the extremes of exoteric legalism and esoteric mysticism. In many ways, Yassine, like al-Bannā’ and Ḥawwa, stood in a tradition of reformist and activist Ṣūfism which included such orders as the Shādhiliyya, Tijāniyya, and Naqshbandiyya, all of whom advocated a form of Ṣūfism compatible with *sharīʿa* and prophetic hadīth and sought

---

³ Yassine also employed the term, “Sunnī Ṣūfism” (*al-taṣawwuf al-sunnī*), to refer to the more “*sharīʿa*-minded” Ṣūfism he advocated (1998, 1:32).

⁴ For more on ‘Abduh’s Ṣūfism and the attempts by later Salafīs to suppress this aspect of his thought, see Scharbrodt 2007.
religious and socio-political reform and renewal, often by activist means. Unfortunately, scholarship on Islamist movements has largely ignored this Islamist tradition, focusing on the exoteric scripturalism and fixation on law more readily found in Wahhabism and overlooking those elements of Islamist movements concerned with interior formation and spiritual guidance (tarbiya) (Lauzière 2005).

While Yassine and Ḥawwa both embraced “Salafi Ṣūfism” as a paradigm meant to chart a middle way between the extremes of Ṣūfism and Islamic law and recognized the importance of tarbiya for any effective movement, they differed in their appropriations of the vocabulary of commanding and forbidding. That is, while Ḥawwa’s treatment of the duty evidenced a substantive connection to classical accounts of the discourse, especially that put forward by al-Ghazālī, Yassine’s discussion of commanding and forbidding was more tenuously tied to the classical period. Rather, like al-Bannā’, he employed the Qur’ānic passages advocating the performance of the duty as support for the creation of a cadre of the ethico-spiritual elite to bring spiritual enlightenment to the slumbering masses in the form of “true Islam.” By embarking on a spiritual journey towards the attainment of spiritual benevolence (iḥsān) which entailed the performance of certain devotional practices in order to train the soul and thereby subdue the ego, members of this vanguard would cultivate the virtues necessary for leading the way in transforming society by activist means.

In what follows, I begin with a brief account of Yassine’s life before moving on to present an overview of his activist thought, which he characterized in terms of a “prophetic method” (al-minhāj al-nabawī). I then examine the role played by the “commanding right and forbidding wrong” discourse in Yassine’s thought, highlighting both Yassine’s overriding focus
on the duty’s ethical and spiritual underpinnings as well as his deployment of the Qur’ānic language of commanding and forbidding to conceptualize an ethico-spiritual vanguard. I conclude with an analysis Yassine’s conception of tarbiya and the cultivation of virtue. In his discussion of these subjects, Yassine followed a prominent tradition which characterizes ethical formation in terms of the “greater jihād” as opposed to the “lesser jihād” which dealt with the just use of force. According to Yassine, this jihād of the self (al-nafs) preceded and served as the foundation for all other forms of struggle; however, it did not supplant the “lesser jihād.” As we will see, while Yassine embraced non-violence as his movement’s primary means of bringing about change, he was at times ambiguous in what precisely he meant by it.

‘Abd al-Salām Yassine: Islamist and Şūfī Holy Man

Not much is known with certainty about Yassine’s early life apart from his own narrative. He was born in Marrakesh in 1928 to an impoverished Berber family who nonetheless claimed a sharīfian ancestry that, like the Moroccan king, linked them to the prophet Muḥammad (Zeghal 2008, 85). Yassine received a religious education early in his life, committing the Qur’ān to memory. In 1943, he entered into the Ibn Yusuf Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Marrakesh, an historic institution for religious education, but which had been reformed in light of the modern educational movements that were increasingly found in Morocco. Though it was authorized to train judges (qāḍīs), it did not possess the prestige and historical standing of the Qarawīyyin in Fez, the center of the Moroccan scholarly world where individuals trained to become ‘ulamā’. Here he studied with traditional scholars, learning classical Arabic and reading the canonical texts of the religious sciences, though, according to his autobiography, he never intended on becoming a scholar of the law (ʿalīm). When Yassine completed his schooling in the
madrassa in 1947, he entered teacher training school in the Moroccan capital of Rabat to become an instructor of Arabic. While there, he also began learning French. After Morocco achieved independence from France in 1956, Yassine became an inspector and later inspector-general in the Ministry of Education, a post he occupied for twenty-seven years (Shahin 1997, 193).5 Throughout his academic training and professional career, Yassine accrued a broad swath of experiences in both traditional and modern forms of education. Consequently, he did not fully belong to either the scholarly world of the ‘ulamā’ or that of the bureaucratic government ministry where he worked for most of his adult life (Zeghal 2008, 85).6

In 1965, Yassine experienced what he later described as a spiritual crisis and joined the Boutchichiyya Ṣūfī brotherhood, a branch of the Qādariyya order established in the Beni-Snassen region in northeastern Morocco in the seventeenth century (88). There he came under the influence of Sheikh ʿAbbas al-Qādirī (d. 1972), the only individual Yassine referred to as master (murshid). Recalling this experience in his 1974 open letter to King Hassan II, “Islam or the Deluge,” Yassine spoke of how God released him from his ignorance and led him to the path

---

5 In his 1974 open letter to King Hasan II, “Islam or the Deluge,” Yassine stated that it was from his experience in both traditional and modern educational institutions that he became equipped to speak of the ‘ulamā’, as their student, and of the administrative corruption in Morocco, as an administrator and educational expert (Shahin 1997, 193).

6 Lauzière notes that throughout his writings, Yassine frequently reminded his readers that he was no jurist (faqīh). While this obviously has something to do with his lack of extensive formal training in jurisprudence (uṣūl al-fiqh), Lauzière observes that Yassine might have also had strategic reasons for not focusing on Islamic law in this thought, namely the lack of success which nationalist Salafis such as ʿAllāl al-Fāsī (d. 1974) had in reestablishing the full jurisdiction of the sharīʿa courts following independence from the French in 1956. Part of this stemmed from the “intellectual colonialism” which al-Fāsī argued continued to shape the religious and political views of the Moroccan elites (makhzen), but it also resulted from the growing dominance of the monarchy. Lauzière writes, “In the 1960s-under Muhammad V and during the first years of Hassan II’s reign-al-Fasi may reasonably have thought that the implementation of a fully Islamic legal system was still possible. When Yasin became an Islamist activist, however, such hopes had already diminished. The ascendancy and resilience of Hassan II proved to be a major obstacle. The king controlled the religious field, which he used to enhance his legitimacy and silence opposition. A revised Islamic jurisprudence-unless ordered by the king himself-would stand little chance of being implemented” (2005, 256).
of truth (tarīqat al-haq) by granting him a Ṣūfī sheikh who he came to love. Thus, as Yassine stated, “I found the truth with the Ṣūfīs as al-Ghazālī found it…” (1974, 5). From 1965-1972, Yassine remained a disciple of Sheikh ʿAbbas, from whom he learned about such Ṣūfī practices as dhikr and companionship (ṣuḥba) which were to play pivotal roles in his later Islamic activism. He described this time as a “mystical sleep, which lasted for six years, in the course of which I reread the whole Qurʾān and the prophetic tradition with a new heart” (Zeghal 2008, 92).

Following the death of Sheikh ʿAbbas, Yassine became increasingly disillusioned with the order which he believed was beginning to embrace innovative (bidʿa) practices such as accepting gifts and introducing furniture into the lodge (zawiya). Moreover, as he related, part of his disillusionment also stemmed from his growing belief that the Ṣūfī way demanded, not isolation from the world, but engagement with it (92-93). He finally broke with the order to begin an activist career of his own, writing such manifestoes as his 1972 Islam Between Daʿwa and the State (Al-Islām bayna al-daʿwa wa al-dawla) and his 1973 Islam Tomorrow (al-Islām ghadan).

However, it was through his 1974 letter addressed to King Hassan II, “Islam or the Deluge” (Al-Islām aw al-ṭawfān), that he established a name for himself. This 114-page letter reflects well Yassine’s elegant style and mastery of the Arabic language. As we read at the beginning of this chapter, with this letter, Yassine sought to speak out against the king in the tradition of advice (naṣīha) literature which historically served to guide as well as admonish political authority. Yassine charged that King Hassan II, son of Muḥammad V, the first king of

---

7 His critics in the order, some of whom called him “Mister Sharīʿa” because of his criticisms of the order’s withdrawal from politics, attribute his leaving, not to any previously held religious and political commitments, but to the conflict that resulted between Sheikh ʿAbbas’ family and Yassine over his ambition to accede to power in place of the descendants of ʿAbbas, which is standard practice in the brotherhood. There is no mention of such conflict in the brotherhood’s own account of the transition which speaks only of an orderly passing of leadership from Sheikh ʿAbbas to his son, Sidi Hamza (Zeghal 2008, 92).
Morocco following its independence in 1956, was guilty of exacerbating economic inequality and corruption, both in his inaction in addressing these injustices as well as in his lavish lifestyle. In light of these transgressions, Yassine called on the king to follow the example of Umayyad caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 101/720) who, upon recognizing the profligate nature of his ways, repented and returned his goods to the people. Likewise, declared Yassine, the king should demonstrate repentance (tawba) and “return all the possessions and palaces in the hands of [his] friends and [his] family to the treasury of the Muslims” (1974, 45). Yassine also chastised the king for his domestication of the ʿulamāʾ and lamented how the religious scholars have acquiesced to the king’s authority in order to accumulate wealth for themselves.8

Hassan II’s reaction to the letter was swift and severe. Implying that only a mentally unsound man would write such a letter, he had Yassine arrested and confined to a psychiatric hospital for three and a half years without trial (Shahin 1997, 194). Upon release in 1978, Yassine soon took up activism once again through the publication of his own periodical, al-Jamaʿa, in which he set forth the principal elements of his doctrine. In 1982, he launched his association under the name of al-Jamaʿa, registered its by-laws, and asked that it be legally recognized. Hassan II’s government refused to do so. Despite its lack of recognition, the

8 Malika Zeghal speaks of the reversal of fortune which befell the ʿulamāʾ class who were one of the most powerful institutions at the forefront of the Moroccan nationalist movement throughout much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, with the return to power in 1956 of the ʿAlawī monarchy in the person of Muḥammad V who had been exiled by the French, the power of the ʿulamāʾ began to wane. Zeghal writes, “Despite their place in the nationalist vanguard before independence and their admiration for Muḥammad V, the ʿulama had lost their political influence, submitting to the monarchy and agreeing to share with it the enterprise of defining a Moroccan, Muslim, and Arab nation. The nationalist and Salafist ʿulama worked to support the monarchy and to lay the foundations for its future power by constructing the myth of the martyr sultan, which was particularly effective when the king was exiled in 1953. Aware of the opportunity, the monarchy used this symbolic image and endeavored to control its principal authors, so that by independence, the great majority of ʿulama were snapped up by the regime of Muḥammad V. Most of them played the political game according to the rules laid down by the monarchy” (2008, 24-25).
association worked on recruiting followers, especially among high school and university students, teachers, university professors, engineers, civil servants, workers, and peasants (194). Organizationally, it developed a framework very much modeled on Ṣūfī orders and the Muslim Brotherhood (which itself was modeled on Ṣūfī ṣarīqa) and thus included a General Guide (al-murshid al-ʿām), Bureau of Guidance, Regional Councils, branches, cells (shuʿba), and families (usra) (194).9 In 1987, the group changed its name to the Justice and Spiritual Benevolence Association (JSA) (Jamāʿat al-ʿAdl wa al-Ihsān). Throughout the late eighties and early nineties, the JSA demonstrated its growing popularity and organizational mien with its protests in support of the Palestinian Intifada’s second anniversary in 1989 and against the first Gulf war in 1991 (195).

During much of this time, Yassine was periodically either imprisoned or placed under house arrest. However, his circumstances changed with the death of Hassan II in 1999 and his son Muḥammad VI’s subsequent ascension to the throne. In inheriting the throne from his father, Muḥammad VI also assumed the title of “commander of the faithful” (amīr al-muʾminīn), thus making him the highest religious authority in Morocco. Wanting to depart from his father’s so called “Years of Lead,” Muḥammad VI sought to bring transparency and a reformist ethos to the monarchy. As part of this endeavor, he released Yassine from house arrest and allowed him to

9 In examining the language used by Yassine to characterize the relationship between the General Guide and organization’s members, Zeghal notes its parallels with that used to describe the bond between the monarchy and its subjects. While Yassine states that the principles of admonition (naṣīḥa) and consultation (shūra) must be found in any successful movement, the principle of obedience is just as important. She quotes him as saying, “It is not necessary for relations between the sovereign and the community to be expressed in legal and administrative form. Codification in law of the principle of obedience...is only a means, not an end. The end is the satisfaction of Allah, the satisfaction of Allah through the effort that is made to bring forth his word. There must be in this effort (jihād) a chief and one who submits.... The obedience of Muslims to the chief is not a simple copy of revolutionary discipline. It is an adoration (ʿibāda) that comes from the heart. The chief is loved (muhabb), feared with respect (muhabb), looked upon as great, and venerated” (126-127).
conduct his affairs with relative freedom. In some ways, Yassine reciprocated, moderating his rhetoric and the JSA’s approach to activism in the public sphere. For instance, in December 1999, the JSA requested authorization from the Ministry of the Interior to march in support of the Chechen people; the ministry denied permission. A year earlier, the movement had ignored a similar decision from the same ministry when demonstrating in favor of Iraq; however, this time, the JSA acquiesced. Nonetheless, Yassine continued to demonstrate his opposition to the monarchy through such acts as penning another open letter offering advice (naṣīha), this time to Muḥammad VI. Though less confrontational in style than his previous letter to Hassan II, Yassine still called on the new king to repent of his extravagant life style.10

Two developments occurred between this period in the late nineties and Yassine’s death in 2012 that were to have a substantial impact on the JSA and its perception among the people of Morocco. First, the political system was opened to include some degree of competition. In addition to established parties like Istiqlal, the Independence Party (ḥizb al-Istiqlāl), gaining more parliamentary power, Hassan II gave legal recognition to a Moroccan Islamist group, the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) (ḥizb al-ʿadāla wa al-tanmīyya) (Zeghal 2008, 146).

---

10 Rachel Linn notes the differences between Yassine’s 1974 letter to Hassan II and the one he sent to Muhammad VI in early 2000. She states that, “Overall, the letter was shorter, less rhetorical and largely devoid of religious content and religious symbolism. It was also authored in French…which Yassine sarcastically stated was to make it accessible to international diplomatic and media audiences, and a French-speaking Moroccan elite who regard Arabic as an ‘insipid,’ ‘vernacular’ language used only for communicating with illiterates…its content was updated to changed political circumstances and reflected a new strategy for Al-ʿAdl. For example, whereas in 1974 Yassine had criticised the monarchical regime as being contrary to Islam, 25 years on, the monarchy was still powerful, widely popular, and had produced a successful transition to a new king who inspired a degree of optimism in the country. Hence, Yassine’s strategy was no longer to delegitimize the monarchical institution outright, but to challenge Muhammad VI to implement fundamental change while implicitly accepting the continuance of the monarchy’s authority” (2012, 144). Linn is correct in pointing to Yassine’s discursive adaptation in his 2000 letter, but while he demonstrated an increasing willingness to accept the monarchy’s political authority, he never wavered from his opposition to its claims of absolute authority in the religious realm.
This process, already underway in 1992, reached its apex in 1996 and 1998 when the king realized that he could no longer ignore the presence and popularity of Islamist movements in Moroccan society. With its legal status as a political party established, the PJD then began participating in elections and soon became a political force. The PJD and its affiliated Islamist group, the Movement of Unity and Reform (MUR) (harikat al-tawhīd wa al-īṣlah), represented not only a challenge to Yassine and the JSA in their claim to be the most viable Islamist voice in Morocco, but their ascendency also provided Yassine an opportunity to demonstrate the unique value of his own style of Şūfī inspired Islamism. While Yassine adhered to a view of Islam in which Salafism and Şūfism complemented one another, the PJD, MUR, and their sympathizers were much more categorical in their rejection of Şūfism. Much of this stemmed from a Moroccan Salafī tradition which can be traced back to the nationalist, modern reformist, and founder of the Istiqlal party, ʿAllāl al-Fāsī (d. 1974), who embraced a type of Salafism closely aligned to that of Riḍā which al-Fāsī defined as scripturalist, but rational, humanistic, and progressive (Lauzière 2010, 93). As such, he considered the mystical tradition of Şūfism retrograde and not well suited for equipping Moroccans for the modern age. It was this tradition of Salafism that the PJD and MUR inherited, leading them to view Şūfism as not only a theological deviation, but as a force which held the Moroccan people back from reaching their potential.

This dynamic would become especially crucial in light of the second development which was to have a drastic impact on Yassine and the JSA, the 2003 suicide bombings in Casablanca which killed forty-five individuals and shocked Morocco. As it turned out, the bombings had been perpetrated by a local group of Salafīs linked to what the media termed, “Salafī jihādism” (al-salafiyya al-jihādīyya). For decades in Morocco, Salafism had been associated with religious
nationalist figures like al-Fāsī who had opposed French and Spanish colonialism from the perspective of Islamic modernism, but now Moroccans were confronted with a Salafism more akin to the Wahhabism of Saudi Arabian origin which had become ascendant in much of the Muslim world (97). Although they embraced non-violence and were less purist than other Salafī groups under suspicion, soon the PJD and MUR found themselves on the defensive as a result of their Salafī sympathies. Commentators suggested that they had in fact played a role in the bombings, and some legislators even called for their dissolution (98).

It was in this environment that Yassine and the JSA were able to offer themselves as a viable alternative protest movement which could also serve as a bulwark against strains of Salafism that threatened Moroccan society. This stemmed primarily from Yassine’s Ṣūfī proclivities which Moroccans associated with being peaceful and more tolerant of religious diversity. Recognizing this advantage, Nadia, Yassine’s daughter and JSA spokesperson, said in reference to the bombings, “[The authorities] will realize that we’re the loyal opposition and against destabilization. Already they understand that our program for political change is based on spirituality, acts of faith and [is] close to the Sufi program” (99). Thus, the entrance of Islamist parties like the PJD into the political arena and the 2003 Casablanca bombings created an environment for Yassine that was conducive to the success of the JSA and his own unique brand of “Salafī Ṣūfism.” Until 2003, the leaders of the PJD and MUR had promoted their connections to purist Salafi Islam; however, those affinities had now become political liabilities while those religious discourses which occupied a more moderate end of the Islamic spectrum came into increasing favor (98). Yassine soon stood out in his ability to present a viable movement in the Islamist tradition which also promoted certain activist virtues such as patience (ṣabr) as well as
non-violent methods of protest, all of which stemmed in great part from his reliance on Ṣūfī forms of thought and practice.  

Yassine and the “Prophetic Method”: An Overview of His Activist Thought

Yassine described his approach to creating an effective Islamic organization and movement in terms of the “prophetic method” (al-minhāj al-nabawī) which offers itself as the third way between the extremes of Ṣūfism and legalism in its ability to address the interior and exterior dimensions of the Muslim life. For Yassine, one cannot address the exterior (ẓāhir) without attention to the interior (bāṭin) and vice versa. The minhāj, therefore, is not just a devotional program but a blueprint for action as well. It denotes both a path and the method by which one should walk it. This path is vertical in its focus on the transcendent oneness (tawḥīd) of God and horizontal in its concern with the well-being of the human community (Lauziére 2005, 251). Key to this minhāj was Yassine’s conception of spiritual education (tarbīya) which leads one through a series of stations (maqāmāt) to the acquisition of spiritual benevolence.

---

11 Henri Lauziére argues that, in his particular blend of socio-political activism and spiritual development, Yassine does not fit into Olivier Roy’s “post-Islamist” conceptual paradigm which defines “Islamist” actors and movements in terms of those Muslim activists such as Mawdūdī, Qutb, and Ayatollah Khomeinī (d. 1989) who held a top-down model of socio-political change through the creation of an Islamic state. Though this style of Islamic activism encountered some success, most notably in the 1979 Iranian Revolution, it soon fell on hard times with the growing disillusionment with the Iranian regime and the continued political impotence of the Muslim Brotherhood. Consequently, there arose movements in place of political Islam devoted, not to effecting political change, but rather to spiritual transformation. Or so the story goes. According to Lauziére, this “post-Islamist” theory is flawed not only because it overly relies on recent developments in just three countries: Pakistan, Egypt, and Iran; but also because it cannot account for those movements such as Yassine’s which have continued to follow al-Bannā’ in advocating a form of re-Islamization from the bottom up. As Lauziére observes, “post-Islamist” theory tends to overlook this second group, as if the strategy practiced by al-Bannā’ came to an abrupt end in the 1970s (2005, 250).

12 The language of minhāj as “path” or “method” comes from Q. 5:48 which states, “And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth. To each of you we prescribed a Law and a method (minhāj)” (Sahih International version).
(iḥsān), without which no Islamic movement can be successful. He wrote, “There is no liberation without struggle, and no struggle without organization, and no organization without a system of leadership, and nothing of value can be expected from the whole organization without *tarbiya*” (1994, 67). With proper organization, leadership, and *tarbiya*, it becomes possible to create “soldiers of God” (*jund Allah*) who combine the best aspects of legal, spiritual, and politico-scientific knowledge and thus serve as the vanguard (*ṭalīʿah*) for the Islamic state (24).

While Yassine’s emphasis on organization and the importance of a vanguard demonstrate his reliance on strains of Islamist activism from such figures as al-Bannā’, Abū al-Aʿlā Mawdūdī (d. 1979), founder of Pakistan’s Jamaʿat-e-Islāmī, and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), revolutionary thinker of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, his thought was also very much a product of his Moroccan milieu, specifically its long tradition of activist Šūfism. In addition to figures such as al-Bannā’ and Quṭb, he also claimed to emulate Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Kabīr al-Kattānī (d. 1909), a Moroccan ʿalīm and member of the Šūfī Kattānīya order who rebelled against Sulṭans ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and ʿAbd al-Ḥafīḍ for their policies imparting protected status to the European powers encroaching on Moroccan territory. As was the case for al-Bannā’ and Quṭb, al-Kattānī was executed for his opposition to political authority. As a form of protest, al-Kattānī too wrote a letter admonishing the ruler entitled “Advice of the People of Islam” (*Naṣīhat ahl al-Islām*) (Munson 1993, 167). In his own letter to Hassan II, Yassine spoke of al-Kattānī as a saint (*walī*).

---

13 Of note is that in *Prophetic Method*, Yassine mentioned not only al-Bannā’ but also Ḥawwa and specifically, his *Our Spiritual Education* (*Tarbiyatunā al-rūḥīyya*), as exemplars of modern Muslim activists who looked to Šūfism as the core of *tarbiya* (1994, 335).
Allah) and role model for the type of activism he advocated, thereby placing himself in the activist tradition of the righteous holy man found in Morocco (1974, 8).

In addition to these more modern figures, Yassine placed himself in the tradition of two prominent scholars from classical Islam: Ibn Taymiyya and, most importantly, al-Ghazālī, who represented for Yassin the eminent synthesizer of the discursive religious sciences (ʿilm) and Śūfism. We have already seen how Yassine identified with al-Ghazālī when speaking of his spiritual crisis, but it is in his project to put forward a conception of Islam and Islamic activism which reconciled the insights of Śūfis and the ʿulamāʾ that we find more substantial parallels (1998, 1:28-29). However, as Yassine knew, al-Ghazālī was not always the most authoritative of scholars among contemporary Islamists, and so he also pointed to Ibn Taymiyya as a figure to be emulated and as one who, contrary to the claims of many Salafists, approved of Śūfism and confirmed its place as one of the noblest sciences of worship (ʿalūm al-ʿabād) (28-29). And while Yassine most often invoked al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyya as exemplars in attending to both fiqh and taṣawwuf, he also presented insights into the nature and practices of tarbīya from such prominent historical Śūfī scholars as ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (d. 561/1166), Aḥmad al-Rifāʿī (d. 578/1172), and Abū ʾl-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258) (1998, 2:414-36).

---

14 In his study of Moroccan Śūfism, Vincent Cornell speaks of its activist nature, especially in terms of certain archetypes which are central to it such as that of the ṣāliḥ. He writes, “[t]he most basic type of premodern Moroccan saint was the ṣāliḥ, a Qur’anic concept that goes back to the very origins of Sufism and reflects the Maliki tendency to favor praxis over doctrine. To the authors of Moroccan hagiography, the ṣāliḥ exemplified the ethical authority of sainthood…. As an ideal type, the ṣāliḥ stood above all for social virtue (ṣalāḥ). Consequently, the ṣāliḥ was frequently associated with the Sufi traditions of futuwwa and the ṭariqa al-malāma, the path of blame…. The ṣāliḥ’s relationship with the malāmatiyya tradition can be seen in the saint’s tendency to act as a critic (nāṣiḥ) and in his and her advocacy of the Qur’anic injunction to ‘command good and forbid evil.’” (1998, 277). And earlier, he states that, “a major premise of this book has been that social activism is integral to the traditions of Moroccan Sufism. As we have seen in the previous chapters, many Moroccan saints saw themselves not only as teachers of disciples, but also as major players in local and regional politics” (233).
This defense of Ṣūfism primarily stemmed from Yassine’s repeated focus on the spiritual components of the Muslim life. In the wake of ʿAbduh and Riḍā, many modernist Salafīs and Islamists concerned themselves with the revitalization of fiqh and its interpretation in light of modern circumstances. While Yassine spoke of general legal reforms such as the need for ijtihād, he devoted more of his time to the analysis of the underlying spiritual components of the law as well as those dispositions which are required in order to realize its true goals (maqāṣid). This will become clear in our examination of his interpretation and use of the “commanding right and forbidding” discourse. As we will see, his emphasis on the spiritual and ethical requirements of performing this duty distinguish him from Ḥawwa. Ḥawwa too believed that tarbīya was an essential component to the performance of this duty; however, his formal training in jurisprudence (uṣūl al-fiqh) enabled him to develop a more elaborate legal structure in the three modes tradition of performing the duty. By contrast, Yassine’s account of the perimeters and performance of the duty is comparatively meager. Moreover, he differed from Ḥawwa in the way he followed al-Bannāʾ in his use of the discourse to speak of an ethico-spiritual elite which will form the vanguard (talīʿah) of the Islamic revival (al-ṣāḥwah al-Islāmīyya).

Yassine and the Spiritual Underpinnings of “Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong”

One finds references to “commanding right and forbidding wrong” throughout Yassine’s work. In the text which lays out most extensively his approach to Islamic activism, The

---

15 Yassine did publish a study of Islamic law entitled, Perspectives in Fiqh and History (Naẓrāt al-fiqh wa al-tārīkh), which focused on political jurisprudence (fiqh siyāsī) as a way to criticize authoritarian regimes. There is little technical discussion apart from a section on the ends of jurisprudence (ʿilm al-maqāṣid) which mainly examines al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388) and legal necessity of preserving the ends of sharīʿa which include religious life, soul, mind, family, and property. As Lauziére notes, Yassine claimed that the ultimate purpose of the sharīʿa was not societal stability or the material welfare of people but rather the creation of an environment in which Muslims could spiritually flourish and attain iḥsān (2005, 255-56).
Prophetic Method (Al-Minhaj al-Nabawi), he devoted a section to it entitled, “the jihād of commanding right and forbidding wrong” (jihād al-amr bi ’l-ma’rūf wa ’l-nahy ‘an al-munkar).

Of note is that, just as Ḥawwa, Yassine conceived of the duty in terms of jihād. Also of interest is that the section falls within a larger overall framework beginning, most fundamentally, with jihād of the self (nafṣ) which rests on tarbīya and serves as the essential foundation for all else. There subsequently follows the jihād of wealth (māl), involving the contribution of financial wealth to further the cause of God and sever one’s dependence on material comfort, as well as the jihād of education (i’līm), which entails not only the acquisition of formal religious knowledge (’ilm) but the proclamation of God’s message (da’wa) as well. It was only after one had passed through these stages that one could perform the duty to “command right and forbid wrong.”

Yassine begins his discussion of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” by examining a question which historically occupied those who took up this particular discourse, precisely who was to perform the duty. While Yassine stated that this is a duty (wājib) incumbent on Muslim individuals, he assigned the education, performance, and oversight of the duty to a future Islamic state (1994, 357). With the creation of an Islamic state, the political authority would serve an integral role in supporting the execution of this duty; however, it was rather the officials of da’wa (rijāl al-da’wa) who would oversee its implementation (357). Yassine affirmed the necessity of bringing together religion (dīn) and state (dawla), and as a result, the state was to assume the tasks of da’wa and jihād. However, also of importance for Yassine was that dīn and dawla be protected from one another. Therefore, Yassine put forward a model that erected a functional separation between the two entities by establishing a division of labor between statesmen (rijāl al-dawla) and preachers (rijāl al-da’wa). Thus, as Zeghal states,

The official preachers, backed by the authority and legitimacy of the state, were to begin by performing the duty in the realm of public affairs (al-shūn al-ʿāma), thus creating an environment where Muslims could thrive and attend to their tarbīya (358). Moreover, with an environment that was conducive to tarbīya as well as with the pedagogical work carried out by the rijāl al-dawla, all believers would eventually reach a point in terms of their spiritual and educational development where they too could participate in carrying out the duty. In the midst of this discussion of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” in the context of an Islamic state, Yassine, somewhat counterintuitively, expressed frustration with the obsession so many Islamists have with the establishment of such a state. He reminded his readers that the Islamic state served as a means to a more ultimate end; that of ensuring Muslims live according to God’s revealed law (357).

In the intervening periods prior to the establishment of an Islamic state, however, Yassine acknowledged that the umma must continue to “command right and forbid wrong.” He followed the three modes prophetic tradition which speaks of performing the duty by the heart (qalb), tongue (lisān), and hand (yad). This duty, Yassine declared, is imposed on all believers who are empowered through their knowledge of the right (maʿrūf) and the wrong (munkar); all that remained was its implementation (tanfīẓ) (357-58). This was particularly difficult under the conditions of modernity wherein so many regimes in the Muslim world perpetuated a corruption of governance (fasād al-ḥakam). This resulted in the attenuation of the Muslim conscience (damīr) and the fostering of a lethargy (khumūl), both of which diminished the performance of the duty. Endeavoring to maintain a grip on power, many modern regimes distorted the command and prevented their citizens from carrying it out, thereby sabotaging daʾwa (358).
Displaying the concern with Muslim unity so often found among Islamists, Yassine lamented the excesses which too often typified the manner in which some individuals and groups carried out the duty. Some even did so by attacking their fellow believers, a course of action illegitimately developed by the perpetrators which, Yassine asserted, was invalidated by the prayers of those targeted. Perhaps worse than this violence against fellow Muslims was the way in which it stoked sectarianism and distracted from the greatest evil (al-munkar al-akbar) of all, the devilry of the rulers (shayṭanat al-ḥukām) (359). Yassine stated the importance of not allowing oneself to become overly focused on superficial solutions when devising the most effective way to carry out the duty. He wrote, “we must not squander our efforts in pursuing only the outward manifestations of the disease (ẓūāhir al-maraḍ) … we are unable to muzzle all degenerate voices or suppress all adulterers and drunks, and close bars and cinemas” (359). It was not simply to the poisonous fruits that Muslims should direct their attention, but more importantly to the pruning of the diseased branches themselves.

Moreover, the overzealous use of force to “command right and forbid wrong” often produced negative and counterproductive results. Yassine followed the prophetic tradition which speaks of performing the duty by tongue (lisān) and hand (yad) as more praiseworthy than simply doing so by the heart (qalb); however, he also pointed to the dangers involved in the use of the tongue and hand when admonishing or physically confronting others. For Yassine, these dangers stemmed primarily from carrying out the duty without the proper ethical formation. Thus, he warned against protesting with a spirit of cursing (lʿan) and grumbling (tadhimur) because this often led to corrupt behavior. Continually proceeding in this manner only transformed activists into young criminals (al-mujramīn al-ṣighār) with tormented consciences (al-damāʿir al-muʿadhiba) (359). Too often, those who rushed impulsively into activism without
the necessary attitude and disposition became angry and warped, the result of which led to behavior that compromised both themselves and the movement of which they were a part.

As one can see, Yassine’s account of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” illustrates his typical concern with the spiritual over the legal. His discussion of who exactly was to perform the duty as well as his invocation of the three modes prophetic tradition paralleled similar discursive concerns and categories which historically characterized the discourse; however, he departed from the classical tradition in his lack of extended analysis of the range of situations which might call for different modes of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” In this way, he differed with Ḥawwa. While Ḥawwa too shared Yassine’s concern with ethical and spiritual formation, his belief in the essential role tarbīya should play in Islamic activism did not manifest itself quite as extensively in his account of the duty as we have found in Yassine. This resulted partly from Yassine’s lack of extensive formal legal training, a background which Ḥawwa did possess. It also stemmed from Yassine’s overwhelming belief that a deficit of attention to ethical and spiritual formation represented the most significant shortcoming of many modern Islamist movements. As we will later see, while he praised his Islamist forbearers such as Mawdūdī and Quṭb, he also criticized their neglect of tarbīya, the resources for which Yassine believed most readily resided in Şūfism.

While Yassine differed with Mawdūdī and Quṭb regarding their undeveloped views towards spiritual education and their skepticism towards Şūfism, he shared with them a belief in the capability of a well-organized movement to transform society.\(^{16}\) We find this belief reflected in the way Yassine employed the “commanding right and forbidding wrong” discourse to put

\(^{16}\) For more on these elements of Mawdūdī and Quṭb’s thought, see Nasr 1994 and 1996 (for Mawdūdī) and Abu-Rabi’ 1996 (for Quṭb).
forward a vision of activism anchored in the power of the vanguard (ṭalīʿah) to effect change. In his discussion of the political jihād (siyāsī), he spoke of a special group (umma khāṣa) from within the wider umma (umma ʿāma) which was charged with “commanding right and forbidding wrong.”

In support of this claim, he cited Q. 3:104 which states, “And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful.” His reference to this movement as an umma khāṣa set apart for a special task followed al-Bannāʾ’s use of the same categories derived from his Sūfī background to discuss the Muslim Brotherhood (Abu-Rabi’ 1996, 67).

The work of this vanguard took place on both the educational and political levels. In his section on the jihād of education (tʿalīm), he referred to a vanguard of the umma (ṭalīʿah al-ʿumma) and army of God (jund Allah) that would teach and spread the message of God throughout the cities, villages, mosques, and schools, leading the people out of ignorance just as the prophet Muḥammad did for the first Muslim community (1994, 355). This group, it would seem, formed the precursor to the rijāl al-daʿwa who would assume these responsibilities in the future Islamic state. In order to effect social and political change, the vanguard was to function as an “elite among the masses, a coherent movement characterized by solidarity (mutaḍāmina)” (371). This was crucial for a herd.

17 Of note is that Yassine’s conception of an umma khāṣa also resonated with Leninist notions of a vanguard. There is little doubt that, especially throughout much of the midcentury and continuing even into the 1970s, Marxist-Leninist categories such as “class,” “revolution,” and “vanguard” shaped Islamist thought and practice. In their very opposition to communist and socialist thought, Islamist thinkers such as Mawdūdī and Quṭb employed communist and socialist categories. As Munson declares, the same can be said of Yassine. Yassine spoke against secular Moroccan intellectuals’ dependence on Western thought, but he depended on it too, for instance, in his use of the “oppressor class” (al-tabaqat al-zalima). Thus Munson concludes, “[l]ike most twentieth-century fundamentalists, Yasin borrow[ed] the rhetoric of the secular ideologies he condemns” (1993, 170). For more on this in Mawdūdī, see Nasr 1996, 70-71.

18 As discussed in chapter two, Al-Bannāʾ belonged to the Ḥaṣafī tarīqa which conceived of its adherents as a group set apart from the rest of society to spread God’s message. As Abu-Rabi’ notes, this contributed to the self-perception held by al-Bannāʾ that he belonged to a special class of people responding to a special call (1996, 67). Cornell points out that this same distinction may also be found in Moroccan Ṣūfī literature (1998, 136).
mentality had taken hold among Muslims, preventing them from seeing the truth of the world around them (371).

**Tarbiya and the Lesser and Greater Jihāds**

However, before this movement sought to bring about socio-political change, it was incumbent that it first attend to its own self-transformation through ethical formation and spiritual education. This, Yassine asserted, was the jihād al-nafṣ, the greater jihād; however, the emphasis on this as a necessary foundation did not mitigate the responsibility to carry out the lesser jihād which involved physical struggle for the justice of the community (337-38). Nevertheless, one must begin with spiritual education, or tarbīya, which Yassine conceptualized as a journey. He wrote, “Islam is an ascent, it is not a stationary state. The first rung is that of the practicing Muslim, attentive to fulfilling the obligations the Law prescribes for every Muslim. The second rung is that of the iman, a higher degree, where worship and moral rectitude are on a par. The third degree, ihsan, is the springboard for the great spiritual journey and its infinite space” (2000, 111-12). In order for one to progress on this path, it was necessary that they cultivate the proper conduct (sulāk) which Yassine defined in terms of temperance (iqtiṣād). As Yassine noted, iqtiṣād might be understood in a number of ways, from moderation (ʿitidāl) and the middle-way (tawassaṭ) to straightness (istiqāma) on the road between the ends of excess (1998, 2:373). This emphasis on moderation in proper conduct was intimately tied to Yassine’s

---

19 The tradition of the “greater” and “lesser” jihād is based on a prophetic hadīth which says, “We were told by Layth, on the authority of ‘Ata’, on the authority of Abū Rabah, on the authority of Jabir, who said, ‘The Prophet returned from one of his battles, and thereupon told us, ‘You have arrived with an excellent arrival, you have come from the Lesser Jihad to the Greater Jihad - the striving of a servant (of Allah) against his desires.’” Though a number of Muslim scholars have deemed this particular hadīth to have a weak (ḍaʿīfa) chain back to Muḥammad, it has nonetheless continued to play a pivotal role in the Islamic tradition.
conviction that Şūfism be rooted in the Qurʾān and Sunna for, he believed, without this, extreme ecstatic and antinomian beliefs and behaviors became possible (1998, 1:32-33).

Sadly, according to Yassine, a moderate and Qurʾān and Sunna grounded approach to the science of sulūk which characterized early Şūfism declined in prominence as the discipline became more specialized and esoteric. However, some believers such as al-Jilānī, al-Ghazālī, al-Rifāʿī, and al-Shādhilī maintained a theoretical paradigm that was practical and applied in orientation (1998, 2:374–75). As Yassine observed, al-Ghazālī’s first step towards developing sulūk was practical in that he sought simply to be vigilant and aware of his desire (irāda). Of course, al-Ghazālī did not stop there, developing an ethical framework in his Revival of the Religious Sciences which focused on sulūk and the development of character (akhlāq) (409-10). He, like other practically minded Şūfis, embraced and advocated a tarbīya which emphasized such practices as asceticism (zuhd), isolation (ʿazila), observing silence (ṣamt), fasting (jūʿ), and dhikr. For these individuals, pursuing the path of spiritual and ethical formation concerned itself primarily with conquering of the ego (qahr al-nafs) by way of the training of the soul (riyādat al-nafs) (454).

Yassine’s own approach to tarbīya and the training of the soul entailed three components which were companionship and community (al-ṣuhba wa al-jamaʿa), meditative remembrance...

---

20 Yassine referred to this strand of the mystical tradition as “philosophical Şūfism” (al-ṭasawwuf al-falsafī), one which was characterized by its focus on deification (ḥalūl) and a union with the divine nature (ittiḥād) conceived in monistic terms (1998, 1:32).

21 In this section on al-Ghazālī’s contributions to the science of sulūk, Yassine critiqued al-Ghazālī for failing to find and attach himself to a spiritual guide (murshid) which Yassine argued was crucial for one’s ethical and spiritual formation. In contrast, Yassine pointed out, Abū ʿAlī al-Fārmadī (d. 477/1084), a contemporary of al-Ghazālī who followed famed Şūfī master Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1073) and became a prominent Şūfī in his own right, did not make this mistake (1998, 2:410).
(dhikr), and truthfulness (ṣidq). The term ṣuhba usually indicates the Ṣūfī guide/novice relationship as well as that between fellow seekers, and for Yassine, it remained a form of spiritual discipleship, but he now extended this concept to encapsulate all those who belong to any Islamic movement. These relationships created an environment which was conducive to spiritual progress, and moreover, the cohesion that was created by such community served as the building blocks for greater Muslim unity. Dhikr referred to the ritualistic repeating of the profession of faith (shahāda) or other liturgical litanies several hundred times a day both in groups and at certain times, alone. This practice, which Yassine described as “a divine chemistry” (al-kīmīyyāʾ al-ilmīyya), both purified the heart and engendered a greater consciousness of God (taqwa) (146). Finally, ṣidq for Yassine complemented the first two components and served as a requirement for revealing the quality of believers and the level of their willingness to transform the existing order (Shahin 1997, 230). These formed the primary foundation for the achievement of spiritual benevolence (iḥsān) which was a superior stage of consciousness (maqām). Rooted in the Qurʾān and Sunna as a value marking pious Muslims, Yassine took iḥsān to denote an ethical and responsible behavior toward oneself and community to foster life in this world (dunyā) and prepare souls for the next (Lauziére 2005, 246-47).

Yassine devoted much time in his writings to discussing the purpose and methods of a range of spiritual practices because he believed that without such attention, Islamic movements would fail. When examining previous Islamist groups and thinkers such as Mawdūdī and Quṭb, he criticized them for their neglect of tarbīya, which he argued, might have engendered their

---

22 Yassine included seven further virtues which function as applications of the more foundational ṣuhba, dhikr, and ṣidq. They are: giving and sacrifice (badhl), knowledge (ʿalam), action (ʿamal), silence (samt), deliberateness (tuwaʿda), temperance (iqtiṣād), and struggle (jihād) (1972, 329-38).
movements with more success. Yassine noted that Mawdūdī mentioned dhikr, fasting (ṣawm), and repentance (tawbah), but he never developed any substantial models (nimādhaj) for these practices (1972, 294). And if he had been able to gain a better understanding of the ṣuḥba found in Ṣūfism, perhaps he would have done more to integrate it into his own organization. This became especially crucial when Mawdūdī and the Jamaʿat-e-Islami entered the political arena by registering as a political party, a decision which Yassine believed was taken too rashly. This drastically increased their numbers and did not permit enough time for tarbyā (296).

Quṭb too shared in a number of these same failures. While Yassine praised him for his forceful rejection of jāhilī thought and practice and his profound defense of divine sovereignty (ḥākimīyya), he lamented his lack of attention to ṣuḥba (314). Yassine also found that Quṭb spent too little time discussing the manner in which he will wrest control from un-Islamic regimes, other than to speak about “revolution” (thawra). Without attention to the methods by which a movement would achieve control of the political order, an abyss formed which was filled with violence (ʿunf) and irresponsible armed activists who sowed disorder (fītna) (315-16). Such violence, which inevitably was met with the heavy hand of jāhilī regimes, only crushed the faith of the pure youth (shabāb ṭāhir) who waged such resistance. One found encouragement for such action, Yassine admitted, in the work of Quṭb (333-34).

With adequate attention to tarbīya, Yassine believed that such mistakes could be avoided. In confronting the use of violence to effect social change, he relied especially on the values of courteousness (rifq), deliberateness (tuwaʿda), and truthfulness (ṣidq). In speaking of jihād in the path of God (fī sabīl Allah), Yassine asserted that it was marked by forbearance (rifq), not violence (ʿunf) that sought a coup d’État (inqilābīyya) (5). Elsewhere he wrote, “[w]e will
actively await our hour with serenity and nonviolence when we raise our voices everywhere that
the sun will rise again, that an Islamic future awaits humanity” (2000, 149). Rather than
associating nonviolence with inaction or passivity, Yassine described it in terms of a
deliberateness (tuwa’da) marked both by activity and patience (ṣabr) that sought to transform
both the self and the political order. He pointed to Mawdūdī as someone who also practiced an
Islamic activism characterized by moderation, nonviolence, and patience (1972, 333). Of greater
importance than either rifq or tū’dā was truthfulness (ṣidq), which was mentioned above.
Yassine stated that ṣidq served an indispensable role in shaping the intention (niyyah) and
direction (wujha) of Muslim thought and practice (4). It was characterized, not simply by how
one carried oneself, but also by integrity (imāna) and a promise (‘ahd) to serve God and others
(327-28).

While Yassine deplored violence as a method of socio-political change throughout his
writings, it is not always clear what he believed nonviolence to entail. Yassine made a distinction
between force (quwa) and violence (‘unf) that mirrored a further distinction between uprising
(qawma) and revolution (thawra). In this context, force referred to the proper and channeled use
of coercive action according to the norms of jihād and informed by such virtues as deliberateness
(tuwa’da) and truthfulness (ṣidq). It was the power that overcame those barriers of tyranny which
prevented individuals from hearing the word of God. On the other hand, violence (‘unf) was
marked by anger, hatred, and vindictiveness. For Yassine force correlated with uprising (qawma)
and violence corresponded to revolution (thawra). He wrote, “We use the word force (quwa) so
as to avoid using the word revolution (thawra). For in thawra, we find violence (‘unf) and we
want force. Force seeks implementation (tanfidh) on a legal basis (mūd’a al-shar’īyya) while
violence operates according to passion (hūwa) and anger (ghadab)” (1994, 16-17). In addition to the logic laid out here, key to understanding Yassine’s opposition to the term “revolution” is the way in which it was employed by secular revolutionary movements, especially on university campuses where the JSA recruited. Yassine’s particular use of language served both to shape his thought in such a way that it shared a family resemblance with other forms of Islamic activism and also differentiated himself from his socialist competition.

The primary criterion by which Yassine differentiated force from violence was that of intentionality was understood through the lens of truthfulness. The legitimate use of force for Yassine had everything to do with proper intention and motivation, all of which rested on an ethical and spiritual foundation informed by tarbīya. Thus, when Yassine espoused “nonviolence,” he did so in opposition to a use of violence informed by anger and revenge, not necessarily to the use of force per se. He made this clear when he claimed nonviolence as a fundamental tenet of Islam while simultaneously distinguishing this understanding of nonviolence from standard Christian and secular ones. He stated,

> The principle of nonviolence is indisputably one of Islamic law, and we proclaim it loud and clear. The politically effective nonviolence of a Ghandi, and the good-naturedness of the Christian who offers you, sanctimoniously, the ‘other-cheek’ when you slap him on the other one, have no correspondence to the nonviolence of Islam … the model of the Prophet, who justly battled thirteen years against tribalist madness, provides the example of nonviolence. (2000, 105)

In his use of the prophet Muḥammad as the exemplar of Muslim nonviolence, Yassine clearly intended a conception that included the legitimate use of force for certain ends. As we have seen, however, this recognition of the proper use of force was grounded in a model of ethical and

---

23 Examples of qawma for Yassine include the Muslim Brotherhood’s struggle in Egypt, the jihād against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and the 1979 Iranian revolution (1994, 380).
24 In the early 1970s, two Marxist-Leninist organizations, Twenty-three Mars and Ila al-Amam, were particularly popular on university campuses. Their members and sympathizers eventually took control of the National Union of Moroccan Students (Lauziére 2005, 260). See also Zeghal 2008, 61-64.
spiritual formation which prized forbearance, moderation, and truthfulness. The vision of Islamic activism he put forward was one based on long-term struggle which involved the education of the umma so that they may “change the world” later on (1994, 24-25). This was corroborated by his repeated declarations that violence must not be considered a legitimate means for effecting socio-political change as well as by the activism which the JSA practiced. Nonetheless, there remains some ambiguity in Yassine’s thought which enabled him to preach an activism characterized by forbearance and nonviolence while also praising the Iranian revolution of 1979. This has proven quite effective both in terms of recruiting as well as in terms of his larger public image, both within and outside of Morocco.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Yassine was shaped by a tradition of Islamic activism that took from both Şüfi and Islamist forms of thought and practice. He advocated an approach to Islam best characterized as a reformist middle way between the extremes of law and mysticism, and as such, he considered ʿilm and taṣawwuf parts of a greater coherent whole. The term “Salafi Şüfism” was meant to capture this paradigm which Yassine claimed stood in the tradition of al-Ghazâlî, Ibn Taymiyya, and al-Bannâ’. In this anthropological framework wherein the cultivation of virtue was accomplished by performing devotional and social practices in order to train one’s soul, interior and exterior formation were viewed as interdependent, likewise leading to a perspective wherein individual and socio-political development functioned interdependently as well. Thus, devotional practices such as dhikr and fasting as well as the social practice of

---

25 For more the place of nonviolence in Yassine and the JSA, see Entelis 1997, 54; Shahin 1994, 184; Willis 2007; and Zeghal 2008, 124.
commanding and forbidding served as exercises of ethical formation in the quest for spiritual benevolence (iḥsān).

In examining the role played by the “commanding right and forbidding wrong” discourse in Yassine’s thought, we find that his analysis and use of it reveal a more attenuated connection to the discourse in its classical forms, both in its lack of sustained analysis of the performance of the duty and in its focus on creating a vanguard (ṭalīʿah). In this regard, his appropriation of the vocabulary of commanding and forbidding parallels that of al-Bannā’. However, our study also revealed his use of some of the discourse’s historical conventions such as in his discussion of precisely who was given the authority to perform the duty and in his framing of commanding and forbidding in terms of the three modes prophetic tradition. Yassine stands apart from Ḥawwa in the concern he consistently expressed for the spiritual dimensions undergirding the duty’s performance. While Ḥawwa affirmed ethical and spiritual formation as a necessary propaedeutic for activism, the central role played by iḥsān in Yassine’s thought and movement evidenced a greater concern for it. Moreover, he embraced a kind of “non-violence” which Ḥawwa likely did not share. While these differences mark Ḥawwa and Yassine’s understanding and use of the discourse, they both shared a concern with ethical and spiritual formation which they believed was necessary for any effective movement. In this regard, they followed al-Bannā’ in adopting a vision of activism that was informed by Ṣūfism and Islamism in the equal attention it extended to individual, social, and political transformation. These observations challenge that scholarship on Sunnī Islamism which has focused on the exoteric scripturalism and fixation on law more readily found in Wahhabism. As we have seen in this and previous chapters, there is an Islamist tradition which relied heavily on Ṣūfism in its concern with interior formation and spiritual guidance, and
it is crucial that such insights be kept in mind when attempting to understand historical and more contemporary forms of Islamic activism.
CONCLUSION

Over the course of this study, I have sought to shed light on what I have referred to as a “Ghazalian” tradition of Islamism by undertaking a genealogical analysis of the discourse of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” in those Islamist figures and movements shaped by Sufism. While expressions of the duty in the classical period focused on a range of questions stemming from its execution on the interpersonal level, more modern conceptions of commanding and forbidding emphasized the propagation of Islamic societal norms through the creation of organized movements. To be sure, as we have witnessed, modern treatments of the duty continued to include certain elements of the classical discourse such as the “three modes” tradition, a concern with whether the duty was best understood as an individual or collective one, and how the phrases “from you a nation” (minkum ummatun) (Q. 3:104) or “[y]ou are the best nation” (khayra ummatun) (Q. 3:110) were best understood. In fact, in certain contemporary accounts, such as the one provided by Ėawwa, we find verbatim appropriations from pre-modern authorities on the discourse such as al-Ghazâlî.

Still, in the modern period, the discourse of “commanding right and forbidding wrong” was interpreted in such a way as to provide an Islamic conception of organized movements. These movements were conceived as vanguards leading the way towards the transformation of society by educating the masses and disabusing them of the false-consciousness afflicting them as a result of ubiquitous European and secular ideas and practices. For “Ghazalian” Islamists such as al-Bannā’, Ėawwa, and Yassine, this ethico-spiritual elite could not expect to be efficacious in their endeavors unless they were in possession of the requisite character and virtues, and as such, sustained attention to ethical and spiritual formation (tarbîya) was essential.
to the long-term success of their Islamic movements. In conceptualizing their programs of *tarbīya* and the liturgies and practices which would constitute them, all three looked to those forms of “*sharīʿa*-minded” Ṣūfism which had so greatly impacted them. There they found a model of ethical formation in which the exoteric (*ʿilm*) and esoteric (*taṣawwuf*) religious sciences functioned in a complementary manner to address the interior (*bāṭin*) and exterior (*zāhir*) dimensions of Muslim devotional life. Placing this “Salafī Ṣūfism” in a reformist paradigm, they set out to educate the populace in accordance with those Islamic values which they felt were threatened by forces external to their respective communities. By focusing first and foremost on the education of the individual, the foundation would then be laid for the escalating transformations of the family, society, government, and eventually the entire nation.

For a wide swath of Islamist organizations, education was considered the primary site of resistance to that institution which had come to dominate every aspect of modern life: the nation-state. As Ḥawwa bemoaned, the modern state had come to hold sway over every aspect of life, including, perhaps most perniciously, education. Within the nation-state paradigm, public education, with its state approved curriculum, came to serve as “a means of moulding society in the service of the utilitarian ends of a national agenda” (Hatina 2006, 180). This resulted in academic and professional education gradually replacing familial affiliation and patronage as the primary means to acquire social status, with a concomitant effect being that the sources of cultural capital and authority in society shifted from the traditional religious scholars to the urban intelligentsia composed of lawyers, engineers, doctors, and journalists (180). As we saw, this was especially the case with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, though it was somewhat more muted in that organization’s Syrian branch. Regardless, the reformist programs of “Ghazalian” Islamists such as al-Bannāʾ, Ḥawwa, and Yassine entailed the establishment of alternative spaces
outside of the orbit of the state in which the individual’s mind, body, and soul could be purified and prepared for communal engagement and socio-political activism. Interestingly, in their suspicion of the state, al-Bannāʾ, Ḥawwa, and Yassine mirrored al-Ghazālī who, as we recall, focused the attention of his revivalist project on cultivating individual and communal piety in the aftermath of the collapse of the Saljūq-ʿAbbāsid order. In the eyes of each of these modern activist intellectuals, the state posed a threat to the moral condition of the nation, and in response they looked to Islamic models of ethical formation as resources for their projects of societal reform.

However, what separated al-Ghazālī from al-Bannāʾ, Ḥawwa, and Yassine was that for these latter three, their activist programs included aspirations to either seize a state apparatus which they viewed as politically corrupt and morally compromised (as was the case with Ḥawwa), or at least to employ it for the purposes of establishing and maintaining a homogenized Islamic public order and codified Islamic legal system (as was true for al-Bannāʾ and Yassine). This should come as no surprise considering the power which the nation-state came to wield in the modern period, especially in the Arab world. What resulted was an Islamist fascination with the state and a deep faith in it to bring about nation-wide change. A number of scholars have observed the irony in the fact that Islamist opposition to Western political, economic, and cultural forms of domination often focused on securing and harnessing the energies of that most European of institutions: the centralized nation-state (Hirschkind 1997; Asad 2003, 253–54; Hallaq 2013; and March 2015).

Although they were less enamored with the state than many other Islamist leaders, al-Bannāʾ, Ḥawwa, and Yassine viewed control of or influence over the state as key to their
organizational objectives. In light of the wide-ranging power and influence wielded by the modern centralized state in the Arab world, the reality was that religious and socio-political movements of any size were forced sooner or later to confront this institutional leviathan. To be sure, this facet of Islamist discourse, along with others such as Marxist-Leninist notions of class and the vanguard, reveals the degree to which Islamist movements are products of modernity; however, Islamist groups have also sought to re-interpret elements of the historic Islamic tradition in their endeavors to establish a public and legal order informed by Islam. By bringing attention to a “Ghazalian” tradition of Islamism, I have attempted to demonstrate the salience of this claim. As I have shown, in this Islamist tradition which sought to synthesize elements of Islamic law (sharīʿa) and Ṣūfism into an activist program, there are patterns of practical reasoning, models of ethical formation, and even structures of authority that may be said to span both pre-modern understandings of piety, virtue, and communal responsibility and those found in iterations of modern Islamism.

In my view, such analytical insights are crucial when attempting to understand and engage Islamist actors for purposes ranging from academic scholarship to policy formulation to cross-cultural understanding. However, this raises a further question: what of the “Ghazalian” Islamist tradition today? We certainly find it alive and well in a few Islamist groups such as Yassine’s Justice and Spiritual Benevolence Association which, under new leadership including his self-described “Islamist feminist” daughter Nadia Yassine, remains a powerful opposition movement to the Moroccan monarchy.¹ However, it seems safe to say that the predominant stance among contemporary Islamists is that, far from being considered a vital resource for

¹ For more on Nadia Yassine and her role in the JSA, see Euben and Zaman 2009, 302-20.
*Tarbiya*, Şūfism is castigated as backwards, apolitical, and alien to Islam. It is true that anti-Şūfī rhetoric has always been a part of the Islamic tradition, from the early rationalist Mu’tazila and traditionalist Ḥanbalīs to the more modern Wahhābīs and Salafī reformers such as Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā. However, while challenges to the mystical aspect of Islam were historically confined to the fringes of the Sunnī *Sharī‘a*-Şūfī consensus, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed such polemics take center stage among increasing numbers of Muslims (Weismann 2011, 149).  

In many ways, this has resulted from the emergence and growing influence of Wahhābī-inspired types of Salafism, particularly those of a militant nature, which have perpetuated a narrative wherein Şūfism is viewed as corrupt and antithetical to all that Salafism embodies (152-54). As we have learned, this belies a range of early modern and modern activist Şūfī traditions embodied in such figures as Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624), Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1762), and Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs (d. 1837) which considered Salafism and Şūfism complimentary rather than contradictory, and of course, it fails to acknowledge the existence of a “Ghazalian” tradition of Islamist activism. Throughout their lives and work as activist intellectuals, al-Banna‘, Ḥawwa, and Yassine consistently challenged those who put forward false representations of Şūfism, arguing that the sciences of Şūfism provided vital resources for cultivating the interior and ethical dimensions of Islam which were so crucial for the success of Islamist movements; however, they were not able to stem the tide of anti-Şūfī sentiment.

Ironically, in the embrace by Islamist movements such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood or Pakistan’s Jama‘at-e-Islāmī of a Salafī epistemology informed by a scriptural positivism and exoteric focus on law, such movements wind up adopting what is in many ways a

---

2 For more on historical and contemporary debates surrounding the legitimacy of Şūfism in the Islamic tradition, see De Jong and Radtke, eds., 1999 and Elizabeth Sirriyeh 1999.
post-Enlightenment rationalistic worldview which fails to recognize the embodied nature of ethical formation, to deleterious effect. In his study of Qur’ānic schooling and embodied knowledge in West Africa, Rudolph Ware concurs when he writes that the modern Salafī distrust of personified chains of authority and its deep suspicion of the body, both of which were seen as exemplified in “traditional” Islam, in fact, “shared in the colonial discourse of modernity” (2014, 69). By contrast, Ware notes, classical Islamic epistemologies recognized the inherent connection between knowledge and embodiment wherein “true knowledge was seen as held in the human body” (253). This embodied epistemology has undergirded and continues to undergird the educational process of West African Qur’ānic schools which, as Ware extensively documents, entails a “struggle to overcome the limits of these fragile, tired, dying bodies by filling them with knowledge of God and busying them with good works … [so that their] lowly flesh can be raised to a status higher than that of the angels…” (256).

In their emphasis on *tarbīya* as crucial to the effectiveness of any activist movement, “Ghazalian” Islamists such as al-Bannā’, Ḥawwa, and Yassine relied heavily on the kind of embodied epistemologies alluded to by Ware. For these figures, Šūfī practices of bodily discipline and the virtues they produce were required not only for individual flourishing, but as the necessary precondition for an activism aimed at the transformation of society. All had a conception of moral training (*riyāda*) and the refinement of character (*tahdhīb al-akhlāq*) which entailed reliance on devotional liturgies and social practices to discipline the body and interior dispositions for the purpose of cultivating the proper virtues. In this paradigm, the self (*nafṣ*) served as the site of ethical formation by mediating the obligations one had to God, oneself, and others, all of which stand in a web of interdependent relations. Therefore, one flourished only to the degree that she engaged not only in a *jihād* of the self (*al-nafṣ*) but also in societal
transformation through such practices as “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” The resulting model of ethical formation emphasized the cultivation of virtue, not simply through ritual practices (Mahmood 2005), but also through socio-political exchange and interaction.

Such observations not only shed light on an Islamist tradition which has received little scholarly attention, but they also create avenues for exploring the ways in which this Şūfī-centric Islamism, and the early modern and modern activist Şūfī traditions on which it was built, contribute to discussions in the fields of Muslim ethics, the anthropology of Islam, and comparative religious ethics regarding the relationship between practical reasoning, virtue formation, and socio-political activism. Though space (and time) prevents the pursuit of this line of enquiry in the context of this project, I hope to do so in the future with a range of interlocutors (Asad 1993; Moosa 2005; Hirschkind 2006; and Schofer 2007). A number of scholars have explored and analyzed the ethical and socio-political dimensions of Şūfism (Awn 1983; Heck 2006), with some such as Saʿdiyya Shaikh and Scott Kugle writing about what they refer to as “engaged Sufism.” For Shaikh and Kugle, “‘engaged Sufism’ refers to ‘how Sufis strive to create sacred and just relationships between different people, between persons and institutions, and between human society and the non-human environment…’” (2006, 2). In this ethical paradigm, personal and public virtue are conceived as mutually constitutive, and as such, “[t]o enable the refinement of character, the Sufi is encouraged to cultivate social interactions and contribute to the communal sphere in ways that are based on, amongst others, qualities of love, mercy, justice, compassion, generosity and gentleness” (3). Though it is safe to say that Shaikh and Kugle do not share with al-Bānāʾ, Ḥawwa, and Yassine the goals of establishing an Islamic socio-political and legal order, there is much here in terms of the connection between ethical formation and civic engagement that parallels reformist Şūfī and “Ghazalian” Islamist traditions. In
recovering such ethical insights engendered by Ṣūfism, not only is a better understanding made
possible of the relationship between practical reasoning, virtue formation, and public
engagement, but one is able to expand the ways in which the historic Islamic tradition might be
mined for Muslim life today.
REFERENCES


Prior to completing his doctorate in the Department of Religion at Florida State University in 2017, Sam Houston earned a bachelor of arts in history from Baylor University in 2000, a master of divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary in 2005, and a master of arts in philosophy from Boston College in 2008. From 2009–2011, he lived in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., where he taught English at Zayed University, after which he entered the doctoral program at Florida State University. His interests include the intersections of Ṣūfism, Islamist activism, and virtue ethics along with comparative religious ethics broadly conceived. In the fall of 2017, he will begin an appointment as the Brown Visiting Teacher-Scholar Fellow in Religious Studies at Stetson University.