

Roots and Rootings: Sayyid Quṭb's Islamic Fundamentalist Ideology

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I. Overture

A resurgence of interest on Islamic thought has recently dominated the intellectual scene after the events of 9/11 (2001) in New York and, more recently, 3/11 (2004) in Madrid. Tons of literature went off the press purporting to explain Islām to a world that knows virtually little or nothing at all about this religion. Much more interest has been focused on the Islamic Fundamentalist movements, which are usually equated with terrorism or terrorist cells. These materials focus more on the activities or the atrocities that these groups apparently have perpetrated.

In the Philippine front, local media had its own share of this kind of news. Ever since kidnapping became both a vogue and a lucrative business in the southern part of the country, there have been a number of literature detailing not only the harrowing experiences of the victims but also the rationalizations concocted behind secessionist movements that have resorted to such acts due to the alleged indifference of the government to their sad plight.

But what is really the reason behind the acts of these individuals or groups? What drives them to commit deeds that are oftentimes beyond human comprehension? More often than not, materials detail only the events but not the reasons, the effects but not the causes. And fundamentalist groups are conveniently classified with the insane

and the devious, without really probing the causes they are fighting for or the situations that have driven them to undertake extreme measures. These people are not just guns and bombs, but they have an ideology that inspires and drives them, and gives meaning to their actions. They have a world picture that they envision to be their own than what it is now. An analysis, then, into the Islamic fundamentalist ideology is not only necessary but also urgent. The world must understand why these things are happening so that they may be avoided in the future.

This study takes into account the person of Sayyid Quṭb who was one of the foremost thinkers of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and now one of the most influential Islamic fundamentalist ideologues in the world. Yvonne Ḥaddad (1983, 67) writes that few Muslim thinkers have had as significant an impact on the reformulation of contemporary Islamic thought as has Sayyid Quṭb. Furthermore, Shahrugh Akhavi (1995, 400) adds that Quṭb's reputation even exceeds that of Ḥasan al-Bannā, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. He ranks him among Turkey's Sa'īd Nursī, Pakistan's Abū A'lā al-Mawdūdī, and Iran's 'Alī Šarī'atī and Āyat Allāh Ḥumaynī. And according to the prodigious Islamic scholars Esposito and Voll (2001, 73 and 102), Quṭb's influence reaches even the contemporary Islamic thinkers like Tunisia's Rašīd Ġannūšī and Egypt's Ḥasan Ḥanafī.

It was due to his writings that Quṭb was imprisoned and was eventually sent to the gallows by the 'Abd al-Nāšir government in Egypt. His ideas were considered to be very radical and seditious by the government. Probably, he himself did not raise a sword in his lifetime. His mere instrument was the pen with which he has written down his thoughts. But through his writings, people around him were willing to raise and actually raised the sword.

Quṭb has proposed Islamic ideals, but these ideals seem to be unacceptable even to an Islamic country like Egypt. This fact points out to the subversiveness of his ideals, that is, when viewed by the government of 'Abd al-Nāšir. But the fact that he is regarded by many Muslims today as a modern-day martyr suggests to us that his ideas are significant to the Islamic revival that the world is seeing today.

II. Life and Times

Sayyid Quṭb is one of the more famous members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt even surpassing the popularity of its founder, Ḥasan al-Bannā. His popularity is due to his written works that have become the favorite of many Muslim Arab youths. Along with Mawdūdī, he is considered by Western writers as one of the most influential Muslim thinkers of the 20th century.

Quṭb was born on the 9th of October in 1906 in Assyut, which lies south of the Egyptian capital of Cairo. His father was Hajj Quṭb Ibrāhīm, a well-known religious person in his village and member of the Muṣṭafā Kāmil's *al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī* [Nationalist Party]. His mother was also a religious lady from a well-known family. Sayyid is the oldest of five children, two brothers and three sisters (Akhavi 1995, 400).

He entered the elementary and primary school in 1912 in his village of Mūša, in the township of Qāḥā. He finished his primary education in 1918. He dropped out of school for a couple of years because of the revolution of 1919. A year later, in 1920, he moved to Cairo for further education and lived with his uncle, Aḥmad Ḥusayn Uṭmān. While he was in Cairo, he lost his father. Subsequently, he convinced his mother to move with him to Cairo.

Quṭb finished his high school education in Cairo and then enrolled in the teachers' college, Dār al-'Ulūm, in 1929. Ten years later, he became an Arabic language teacher after receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree. Soon afterwards he joined the Ministry of Education. He was in the Ministry for about six years and then resigned because of his disagreement with his bosses and colleagues regarding his philosophy of education and attitude towards the literary arts. Thus, he devoted his time to freelance writing.

During the early years of his teaching and during his stint as a freelance writer, he was beginning to make a name as a poet, writer and literary critic. In 1933, he published a significant work of criticism entitled *Muhimmat al-Šā'ir fī l-Ḥayāt wa Ši'r al-Jil al-Mu'āṣir* [*The Poet's Responsibility in Life and the Poetry of the Contemporary Generation*], and in the following year he published a volume of his poetry under the title *al-Šāfi' al-Majhūl* [*The Unknown Beach*]. He

also wrote several other literary articles and published books on the artistic expressions of the Qur'ān, namely *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī fī l-Qur'ān* [*Artistic Imagery in the Qur'ān*] and *Mašāhid al-Qiyāma fī-l-Qur'ān* [*Scenes of the Day of Resurrection in the Qur'ān*].

At the end of the Second World War, the focus of his writings shifted, culminating in the publication of *al-'Adāla l-Ijtimā'īyya fī l-Islām* [*Social Justice in Islām*] in 1949. In November of that same year, he went to the United States to study educational curricula. He spent two and a half years moving from Washington, D.C. and California. He studied at Wilson's Teachers College, now the University of the District of Columbia, at the University of Northern Colorado's Teachers College, where he earned an MA in Education, and at Stanford University. Before returning to Egypt, he visited England, Switzerland and Italy. Upon his return in 1951, he resumed his job as a teacher and inspector at the ministry of education. (Akhavi 1995, 401).

Quṭb supported the 1952 Revolution and even acted as the liaison between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Society of Free Officers, a secret organization of military officers founded by Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir with the aim of fighting against political corruption and foreign domination in Egypt. After the seizure of power by the Free Officers in 1954, they had a falling out with the Muslim Brotherhood, as each side had their own different agenda. Quṭb left the Revolutionary Command Council, the interim ruling government in Egypt after King Fārūk was deposed in July 1952, upon realizing that the RCC was not prepared to institute Islamic program for the society that the Brotherhood stood for. The Brotherhood also condemned the agreement that RCC made with Britain. The agreement ended the occupation but there was provision about the return of the British within seven years if they perceived a threat to their interests. The Brotherhood demanded to this agreement be put into a plebiscite. A tense standoff ensued culminating with the attempted assassination of 'Abd al-Nāṣir in October 1954.

The Free Officers blamed the incident on the Brotherhood and ordered a sweeping crackdown among the rank and file of the Brotherhood, which maintained that the plot was engineered by the Free Officers themselves to justify their actions. Eventually, Quṭb was arrested by the government and he spent the rest of his life in prison.

Qutb was already detained for three months in early 1954, and then was released, only to be caught in a web of arrests. Although he suffered from ill health, he was still brutally tortured. In May 1955, he was transferred to the prison hospital and spent the largest part of his prison life there. In July, the court sentenced him to fifteen years in prison. And while there, he witnessed the barbarity against his colleagues, the worst of which occurring in 1957 when a score of the Brothers were killed outright and a dozen more injured (Akhavi 1995, 401).

Upon the intervention of Iraqi President 'Abd al-Salām 'Ārif, Qutb was released from prison in May 1964. But he was rearrested a few months later, accused of plotting against the government. Apparently, in his last book, *Ma 'ālim fī l-Ṭarīq* [*Signposts on the Road*], Qutb called for an armed overthrow of the state. Qutb was tried publicly, but the more sensitive proceedings were held behind closed doors as when the defendants talked about their torture. No incontrovertible evidence was presented against Qutb, and the prosecutors relied mostly on his book, *Ma 'ālim fī l-Ṭarīq* [*Signposts on the Road*]. On August 29, 1966, despite great international pressure, the government executed Qutb and two of his colleagues. Since then, he has been regarded as a martyr by his supporters (Akhavi 1995, 401-401; Shepard 1996, xvii).

III. Turning Points of His Thoughts

The Islamic ideal of Qutb did not develop on a smooth straight plane. It underwent several changes precipitated by the shifts in the political atmosphere along Qutb's lifetime. The process, however, did not involve any paradigm shift, but a continuous evolution towards the radicalization of his thought. In this evolution one can see several discernible turning points that mark his thoughts.

Early in his life, Qutb has already felt the tension between the Western influence and the Islamic tradition. Egyptian life was then experiencing the growing influence of secular education, liberalism and nationalism. Along side these phenomena is the struggle to keep an indigenous Islamic identity as a cornerstone against the current political and cultural encroachment.

Quṭb's early education at his own village in Mūṣa exposed him to Ṣūfī mysticism and Qur'ānic training. It is commonly held that at age 10, he has already memorized the entire Qur'ān. And it was also then that he adopted anti-British sympathies.

Later on, however, he was sent by his father to "modern" school and not to a traditional one. Afterwards, he studied at Dār al-'Ulūm, a non-religious teacher training institute. Incidentally, this was the same training institute that Ḥasan al-Bannā, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, attended seven years earlier. While in Cairo, Quṭb's uncle introduced him to 'Abbās al-'Aqqād, an Egyptian liberal journalist. al-'Aqqād's works reflected the prevailing Western-inspired politics. After his graduation, he worked as an Arabic teacher in Egypt's modern education system. And during this time, the intellectual orientation of Quṭb tended towards the individualist, secularist, and rationalist views of his mentor (Euben 1999, 68). And like al-'Aqqād, he also joined the Wafd Party of Sa'd Zaghlūl. It must be remembered that it was during these times that Quṭb published works on poetry and literature.

At the end of the Second World War, Egypt's old regime teetered on the brink of collapse as political corruption, social stress, economic inequality and the continuing presence of European imperialism hounded it. Like many in his circle, Quṭb turned his attention to issues of social justice, lambasting the old regime for the quagmire that they were wallowing in. During these times, he edited the journal *Al-Fikr al-Jadīd* [*New Thought*] and later on wrote *al-'Adāla l-Ijtimā'īyya fī l-Islām* [*Social Justice in Islām*]. Quṭb has turned to an Islamic orientation, making it clear that true social justice can only be realized in Islām. Also by this time, he has become sympathetic to the views of the Muslim Brotherhood, but held back from joining them, maintaining his independence as an intellectual.

Because of his bitter attacks on the ruling regime, he was said to be sent to the United States for either two reasons: first, to escape the wrath of the monarchy; or second, he was sent there precisely to be "modernized." Whatever the real reason for his being sent to the US, we will perhaps never know. But it was during his stay in the West that Quṭb's Islamic views became clearer.

In the United States, right before his very eyes, Quṭb saw the materialistic attitude of the literary arts and its lack of spirituality. That trip was a defining moment for Quṭb and marked his shift from a literary man to an Islamist. His ideas emerged clearer about the corruption of the prevailing social, political and economic systems. And the only way to change this is by undergoing an Islamic reform. Upon his return to Egypt, Quṭb joined the Muslim Brotherhood and immediately became one of their leading ideologues (Shepard 1996, xvi). Eventually, the old monarchical regime was ousted by the Free Officers and the Muslim Brotherhood. This moment ushered for Quṭb a new hope for a better society.

Initially, everything went well with the Free Officers and the Muslim Brotherhood until their falling out in 1954, highlighted by the imprisonment of Quṭb and his colleagues. From the prison, Quṭb continued to write and even revise his earlier writings. With the witnessing of the brutality committed against his colleagues, he became more and more radically Islamic in his thought. He had witnessed for himself the failure of the Egyptian liberal and socialist regimes. It was during this period that Quṭb wrote his monumental commentary on the Qur'ān, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān* [*In the Shade of the Qur'ān*]. And during his brief release from prison, he wrote *Ma 'ālim fī l-Ṭarīq* [*Signposts on the Road*]. Here, he openly declared that the existing order in all countries, including the so-called "Muslim" ones, was anti-Islamic, and called on Islamic activists to prepare themselves to replace the present *jāhili* order. He urged resistance by turning away from the present existing society and creating a model *umma*, which would eventually establish true Islām (Shepard 1996, xvii).

Throughout his life, Quṭb experienced historical moments that constrained and framed his political thought. Yet it is clear from the beginning that Quṭb's preoccupation was the moral life and the spiritual realm. His anxiety about the threat to Islamic faith remained with him all throughout his life. In the end, he resolved this anxiety by trying to recapture the timeless "essence" of Islām.

IV. Writings and Method

Sayyid Quṭb was a prodigious writer and has produced a number of published and unpublished works. He was a literary figure, poet, novelist, lecturer, political thinker and reformer, and an intellectual all rolled into one. Aside from his books, he also published numerous articles which appeared in newspapers and journals such as *al-Risāla*, *al-‘Ālam*, *al-‘Arabī* and *al-Ahrām* (Moussalli 1992, 38-39).

Quṭb's published works, excluding those articles that appeared in journals but including those published posthumously, number around thirty-nine (39). These works can be conveniently divided into two phases:

- A) the first phase constitutes the period from 1933 to 1948, and
- B) from 1949 until his execution in 1966.

From the textual and topical evidence of Quṭb's writings, there is a discernable shift from liberalism to the analysis of general social and political issues from an Islamic perspective and then to radical fundamentalism (Moussali 1992, 43-44). This then forms the basis for such division.

A. First Phase

In the first phase, Quṭb dealt on topics such as poetry, fiction and literary studies. Here is a list of his works:

1. *Muhimmat al-Šā'ir fī l-Ḥayāt wa Ši'r al-Jil al-Mu'āṣir* [*The Poet's Responsibility in Life and the Poetry of the Contemporary Generation*] published in 1933.
2. *al-Šāṭi' al-Majhūl* [*The Unknown Beach*], 1934.
3. *Naqd Kitāb Mustaqbal al-Taḳāfa fī Miṣr* [*A Critique of "The Future of Culture in Egypt"*], 1935.
4. *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī l-Qur'ān* [*Artistic Imagery in the Qur'ān*], 1945.
5. *al-Aṭyāf al-Arba'a* [*The Four Spirits*], 1945.
6. *Ṭifl fī l-Qarya* [*A Child in the Village*], 1946.
7. *al-Madīna l-Maṣhūra* [*The Entranced City*], 1946.
8. *Kutub wa-Šaḥṣīyyāt* [*Books and Personalities*], 1946.

9. *Ašwāk* [Thorns], 1947.
10. *Mašāhid al-Qiyāma fī l-Qur'ān* [Scenes of the Day of Resurrection in the Qur'ān], 1947.
11. *Rawḍat al-Ṭifl* [The Garden of the Child], n.d.
12. *al-Qaṣaṣ al-Dīnī* [Religious Story-telling], n.d.
13. *al-Jadīd fī l-Luġa* [What is New in Language], n.d.
14. *al-Jadīd fī l-Maḥfūzāt* [What is New in Memorized Poetry], n.d.
15. *al-Naqd al-Adabī: Uṣūlu-hu wa-Manāhiju-hu* [Literary Critique: Its Principles and Methods], 1948.

A good number of these written works were later denounced by Qutb himself as un-Islamic. These works view life in a non-Islamic or irreligious terms. Some of the published works were co-authored by other authors and were made as textbooks for the Ministry of Education.

B. Second Phase

In the second phase, Qutb focused completely on the religious and political aspects of Islām in the following works:

1. *al-'Adāla l-Ijtīmā'iyya fī l-Islām* [Social Justice in Islām], first published in 1949.
2. *Ma'rakat al-Islām wa-l-Ra'smāliyya* [Islām's Battle with Capitalism], 1950.
3. *al-Islām wa-l-Salām al-'Ālamī* [Islām and Universal Peace], 1951.
4. *Fī Ṣilāl al-Qur'ān* [In the Shade of the Qur'ān], the first volume appeared in 1952.
5. *Dirāsāt Islāmiyya* [Islamic Studies], 1953.
6. *Hādā l-Dīn* [This Religion], 1962.
7. *al-Mustaqbal li-hādā l-Dīn* [The Future Belongs to this Religion], 1960's.
8. *Ḥaṣā'iṣ al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa-Muqawwimātu-hu* [The Characteristics and Components of the Islamic Concept], 1962.
9. *al-Islām wa-Muṣkilāt al-Ḥaḍāra* [Islām and the Problems of Civilization], 1962.
10. *Ma'ālim fī l-Ṭarīq* [Signposts on the Road], 1964.
11. *Afrāḥ al-Rūḥ* [Joys of the Spirit], published posthumously in 1971.

12. *Naḥwa Mujtama' Islāmī* [Towards an Islamic Society], published posthumously in 1969.
13. *Fī l-Tārīḥ: Fikra wa-Minhāj* [On History: Idea and Method], also published posthumously.
14. *Ma 'rakatu-nā ma 'a-l-Yahūd* [Our Battle with the Jews], published posthumously in 1970.
15. *Islām wa-lā Islām* [Islām or no Islām].
16. *Ilā l-Mutaṭāqilīn 'an al-Jihād* [To Those who are Slow to Respond to Jihād]
17. *Risālat al-Ṣalāt* [Treatise on Prayer], these last three works were culled from numerous articles in diverse sources and published posthumously.
18. *Amrikā allatī Ra'ay-tu* [The America that I Saw], published in part in *al-Risāla* in 1951.
19. *Sinā' bayna Aṭm al-Isti'māriyyīn wa-l-Ṣiḥyūniyyīn* [Sinai Between the Ambitions of the Colonialists and the Zionists], a collection of three articles: one each by Quṭb, Ḥasan al-Bannā, and Kamāl arīf. It was also published posthumously.
20. *Al-Jihād fī Sabīl Allāh* [Struggle in God's Way], 1970. A collection of articles written by Quṭb, al-Bannā and Abū al-A'lā al-Mawdūdī.
21. *Laḥn al-Kifāḥ* [The Melody of Struggle], 1972. It is composed of poems written by Quṭb and Hāsim al-Rifā'i.

C. Methodology

From the writings of Quṭb, especially in the later works, one can detect a prevalent method and style of writing. This methodology reveals much of the way the mind of Quṭb works.

1. Quest for the Qur'ān. Quṭb believes that the text of the Holy Qur'ān is the only reference to what is absolutely true. In all his arguments, he goes back to the Qur'ān as the fundamental source of reference and authority. Even the *ḥadīṭ* is used much less. Due to this adherence to the Qur'ān, Quṭb does not make a lot of references to Western authors. In fact, his references are even limited to translations and not to original texts. Having visited the United States, Quṭb evidently knew English, but has never quoted any source from

its English text. Although Quṭb sometimes refers to Western authors and scholars, he did not really have a deep knowledge of philosophy, science, history and the traditional sciences. He had a very comprehensive knowledge covering a wide field, but he was not a scholar in the true sense of the word (Moussalli 1992, 40 & 43). It must be remembered that Quṭb's training had been literary and non-theological. And he was never recognized as an al-Azhar trained "man of religion." But even with this background, he would explain that he had heard God speaking to him in the Qur'ān (*EI* 2, 9, 118). With the Qur'ān as his constant companion in the prison cell, it can be surmised that his knowledge of the Qur'ān though was unmistakable thorough.

2. Insistence on Islām. Due to his allegiance to the Qur'ānic text, Quṭb subsequently maintains that Islām is the purest form of monotheism and therefore contains the correct principles of life, as well as the proper social and political doctrines. Thereupon, he believes that the dynamic Islamic principles must be enforced in a society in order to ensure its success (Moussalli 1992, 41).

3. Average Audience. Quṭb's writing style suggests that his discourse is shallow and his arguments are wanting. This is so because Quṭb was not writing for scholars or professionals but for the average man. The message of Quṭb is directed towards the public in general, with him wanting to stir reform and attract the Muslims back to the true Islām. And for this, the average audience has no need for a coherent philosophical system nor a detailed discourse (Moussalli 1992, 40).

4. Evoking Emotions. To persuade the average audience, it is not imperative to present a scholarly schema of one's reasonings. What is deemed necessary though is to get one's message across by evoking the emotions. This does not mean to say however that Quṭb's presentation lacks any reasoning at all, but his emphasis was to include in the discourse not only the mind but also the heart. Quṭb was trying to avoid the dry "pure intellectualism" of his contemporaries. By involving emotions then he was merely proposing that the proper discourse between man and man must include emotions and intellect. One of the reasons for Quṭb's emotionalism was that he felt the threat of local and foreign forces encroaching upon Muslim territories and

culture. By proposing human philosophies and systems, man has distanced himself from the real reason of his existence. There was then a marked criticism of human ideologies in the works of Quṭb. Even the Arab and Muslim regimes were not spared from his tirades. By appealing to emotions, Quṭb sought to rouse in man his original calling (Moussalli 1992, 41-42).

5. **Persistent Position.** Quṭb was unequivocal in his stand that the Qur'ān is the only thing necessary for existence and that Islām expounds the best doctrines for human life. Quṭb was unwilling to compromise on this point, holding fast steadfastly to what he believes even in the face of staunch opposition. He did not want to accommodate even the slightest modern idea to infiltrate his vision of Islām, he was oriented towards the purification of the brand of Islām that they have during his time. Such purification would entail going back to the ideal of Islām during the prophet Muḥammad's time. His concept of *tawḥīd* is an evidence of this. Due to this persistent position, he also tended to be repetitious of certain notions and arguments, as if trying to impress on his readers the necessity and urgency to uphold the basic notions and principles that he proposes for the ideal Islamic *umma* (Moussalli 1992, 42).

V. Arguments and Discourses

What is the Islamic vision of Sayyid Quṭb? The ideals of Quṭb will be laid out here as gleaned from his many writings.

A. *The Modern Condition*

One of the more marked differences between Islām and the West is the interplay between religion and politics. In the West, there is a demarcation between the Church and the State; while in Islām, it seems that it is the contrary, as there is a close intimacy between religion and politics. The Prophet was both the recipient of revelation and the founder of a political community. It must be noted that the first year in the Islamic calendar marks the flight of the Islamic community to Medina. For Muslims, this is the actualization of God's will here on earth and thus the prototype for all Islamic communities (Euben 1999, 49). This model though is not all contiguous. There are certain

historical discontinuities and exceptions to the insistence that in Islām politics and religion are two sides of the same coin. However, it is this ideal that spurs Quṭb in his search for the perfect way of life.

1. The Collapse of the Western and Communist Models

Quṭb's journey into the Western countries provided him a first-hand experience into what he considers as the corruption of the Western way of life. Indeed, he noticed that there is material progress, and this is by no means the real development that man is looking for. Man may have developed materially. He may have discovered many things that bring comfort to his life. But he is still forgetting the basic human values necessary to live by as real human beings. In his introduction to his last book, *Ma 'ālim fī l-Tariq*, he writes,

Mankind today is on the brink of a precipice, not because of the danger of complete annihilation which is hanging over its head, this being just a symptom and not the real disease, but because humanity is devoid of those vital values which are necessary not for its healthy development but also for its real progress. Even the Western world realizes that Western civilization is unable to present any healthy values for the guidance of mankind. It knows that it does not possess anything which will satisfy its own conscience and justify its existence (Quṭb 1990, 5).

For Quṭb, democracy in the West has become infertile because it is already borrowing from the systems of the Communist states of Eastern Europe, especially its economic systems under the nomenclature of socialism. However, he noticed that even the Communist model as emphasized by the Marxist brand is already defeated on the plane of thought. He cited the fact that even during his lifetime, there was not any single nation in the world that is truly Marxist. The defeat is prominent not only on the level of thought but also in its external manifestations, for example, in the food shortage that Russia, the leader of the communist countries, suffered. These are, for Quṭb, the tangible proofs for the collapse of the Western and Communist models.

What is the reason for the decline of the Western and Communist models? Quṭb stated that the basic defect of these models is that

they actually conflict with man's nature and his needs. As a consequence these models prosper only in a degenerate society, where man has so debased himself that he no longer recognizes what he truly is. Or they can also prosper in a society where the people are cowed as a result of some forms of prolonged dictatorship. In this society, the people are afraid to express what their real needs are, bowing to the wiles and guile of whoever is leading them.

The Marxist model is particularly pernicious to the perfection of human being because it blatantly denies the existence of God. Concomitant to this is the ascendancy of the party as the sovereign in place of God. These are indications of a *jāhili* society.

2. Modern-Day *Jāhiliyya*

If we look at the sources and foundations of modern ways of life, it becomes clear that the whole world is steeped in *jāhiliyya*, and all the marvelous material comforts and high-level inventions do not diminish this ignorance. This *jāhiliyya* is based on rebellion against God's sovereignty on earth. It bestows on man one of the greatest attributes of God, namely sovereignty, and makes some men lord over others. It is now not in that simple and primitive form of the ancient *jāhiliyya*, but takes the form of claiming that the right to create values, to legislate rules of collective behavior, and to choose any way of life rests with men, without regard to what God has prescribed. The result of this rebellion against the authority of God is the oppression of His creatures. Thus, the humiliation of the common man under the communist systems and the exploitation of individuals and nations due to greed for wealth and imperialism under the capitalist systems are but a corollary of rebellion against God's authority and the denial of the dignity of man given to him by God (Quṭb 1990, 6).

Quṭb takes after the description of *jāhiliyya* from Mawdūdī. The term *jāhiliyya* no longer refers to a particular historical period referring to the ignorance of pre-Islamic Arabia, but to a condition into which a society descends whenever it deviates from the ideal Islamic way of life (Euben 1999, 57). This *jāhiliyya* though is far greater than the first that happened in a historical period. Whereas the first would have been considered an ignorance, this second instance

is now a rebellion against Allāh or a usurpation on his right. When a society refuses to submit to Allāh's sovereignty in the realm of belief, worship and law, then it becomes a *jāhili* society. And according to Quṭb, this is the condition that we find ourselves in.

3. The Need for a New Leadership

Due to the collapse of the Western and communist models, Quṭb insists on a new leadership for mankind. And this leadership will not disregard the material success that the West was able to attain. However, what are more important than this material success are the ideals and values that every human being should have. There should be a system that recognizes both material progress and harness values in man. Quṭb proposes that only Islām can satisfy these requirements. It is a way of life that is harmonious with human nature, positive and constructive, and also practicable.

Quṭb recognizes that Islām does not regard the material advancement made by man. He is after all the vice-regent of Allāh here on earth. And one of his duties would be to take good care of His creation. For Quṭb, the Muslim civilization of his day may be incapable of bringing about the material progress that the West has brought to mankind. But Islām offers something valuable that others do not possess.

To attain the leadership of mankind, we must have something to offer besides material progress, and this other quality can only be a faith and a way of life which on the one hand conserves the benefits of modern science and technology, and on the other fulfils the basic human needs on the same level of excellence as technology has fulfilled them in the sphere of material comfort. And then this faith and way of life must take concrete form in a human society, in other words in a Muslim society (Quṭb 1990, 8).

What differentiates Islām then is its ability to foster human and moral values. And this certainly makes human beings perfect.

According to Quṭb, Islām recognizes the limited capabilities of human beings. But in spite of this, Allāh has provided him with the

necessary powers to at least start to work for his perfection, to attain human and moral values. And through adherence to Islām, man's goal becomes easier to attain.

The faith of Islām is a divinely-ordained path for human life. Its realization in the life of mankind depends on the exertions of men themselves, within the limits of their human capacities and the material realities of human existence in a given environment. Working for this aim starts at the point where mankind finds itself on being given the necessary equipment, and it continues to the end of the path within the bounds of human capacities, insofar as these are put to work.

A basic characteristic of Islām is this: that it never forgets for an instant, at any time or place, the nature of man and the limits of his capacities, nor does it neglect the material realities of his existence. Yet, at the same time, it causes him to attain – as has happened at various periods in the past and can always happen, if the necessary efforts are made – a higher point than that reached by any man-made system whatsoever. This is accomplished with ease, comfort, security and moderation (Quṭb 1998a, 4-5).

Moral values, however, can only take place in a concrete form, that is within a community, society or nation. According to Quṭb, this is a necessity since man of this age no longer listens to an abstract theory that is not concretized in a living society. Man's real progress can only happen then within a Muslim community, and this does not refer to a specific land where Islām resides. Rather,

It is the name of a group of people whose manners, ideas and concepts, rules and regulations, values, and criteria, are all derived from the Islamic source (Quṭb 1990, 7).

4. Islamic Revivalism

Quṭb is also aware that this community had become extinct the moment the laws of God became suspended on earth (Quṭb 1990, 7). Here he was probably referring to the historical discontinuities of the Islamic ideal. One of these would be the *Umayyad* Caliphate where temporal power had taken over religious ideals as the coordinate of human life. Another marker would be the rise of Sufism,

the ideology of which is not exactly political because it abhors the corruption fostered by politics but emphasizes the cultivation of the individual rather than the social, and beckons man to turn to the eternal rather than the historical. The greatest manifestation for Quṭb, however, would be the dominance of Western colonialism.

As a result of these discontinuities, Islām has been forgotten. And Quṭb's call is for the revival of Islām, in order for it to assume the role of the leader of mankind.

It is necessary to revive that Muslim community which is buried under the debris of the man-made traditions of several generations, and which is crushed under the weight of those false laws and customs which are not even remotely related to the Islamic teachings, and which, in spite of all this, calls itself the "world of Islām" (Quṭb 1990, 7)

For Quṭb, the state of *jāhiliyya* does not only apply to the Western and communist countries. It also extends even to the countries that call themselves Islamic. Probably smarting from his unjust imprisonment and countless tortures even at the hands of his fellow Muslims, Quṭb argues that there is no country that can call herself genuinely Islamic. Most of those which call themselves Islamic are not really Islamic in the true sense of the word, but are merely imitating some Western models. "For when Muslims struggle to imitate alien models, they inevitably replicate the ills of Western society in the Islamic world" (Euben 1999, 60).

For Quṭb, it is Islām's duty to annihilate this existing *jāhiliyya*, and establish the submission of the entire humanity to Allāh alone. And there is no compromise. There is no halfway between *jāhiliyya* and Islām. It is an either-or situation not a both-and.

Islām cannot accept any mixing with *jāhiliyya*. Either Islām will remain, or *jāhiliyya*; no half-half situation is possible. Command belongs to Allāh, or otherwise to *jāhiliyya*; Allāh's *Ṣarī'a* will prevail, or else people's desires: "And if they do not respond to you, then know that they only follow their own lusts. And who is more astray than one who follows his own lusts, without guidance from Allāh? Verily! Allāh guides not the people who are disobedient." [Qur'ān 28:50]; "Do they

then seek the judgment of [the Days of] Ignorance? And who is better in judgment than Allāh for a people who have firm faith” [Qur’ān 5:50] (Quṭb 2002c, <http://www.islamworld.net/justice.html>).

Quṭb recognizes the difficulty of undertaking an Islamic revival. But it must be undertaken. The task is urgent. He writes,

I am aware that between the attempt at ‘revival’ and the attainment of ‘leadership’ there is a great distance, as the Muslim community has long ago vanished from existence and from observation, and the leadership of mankind has long since passed to other ideologies and other nations, other concepts and other systems.... But in spite of all this, it is necessary to revive Islām. The distance between the revival of Islām and the attainment of world leadership may be vast, and there may be great difficulties on the way; but the first step must be taken for the revival of Islām (Quṭb 1990, 7).

B. The Islamic Solution

It is clear for Quṭb that there is only one solution to the ills of the modern world. And it is not any form of liberalism, socialism, communism, or any other Western models of society. Islām offers an alternative to these system, and in fact, it is the only alternative. But what are the characteristics of Islām that makes it the only viable solution?

1. The Islamic Worldview

In *The Islamic Concept and Its Characteristics* (1991), Quṭb outlines seven points that identify the Islamic worldview (Haddad 1983, 74-77; Shepard 1996, xxxiv-xlvii; Akhavi 1995, 402).

a. Lordship of Allāh [*rabbāniyya*]. Islām is a religion that has divine origins. And it is the only religion that has remained true to its principles and sources. And only a religion that recognizes the lordship of Allāh will be able to bring fulfillment and meaning into human lives.

b. Constancy [*tabāt*]. All change and progress are to be understood from the basis of the Lordship of Allāh. Social structures may

change, but the essential core neither changes nor develops but remains constant all throughout. For man, the constant axis is his humanity. A humanity that is endowed with divine breath, and subsequently places man above all creatures. Man's elevation or degradation will result from his proximity or distance to the source of his humanity.

c. Comprehensiveness [*šumūl*]. Because of his finitude, man is unable to provide a complete system that takes into account all considerations and aspects. However, when humanity is united in its submission to its source as manifested in their values and laws, then it is at its best. The total human endeavor must become one movement, realizing the sole purpose of human existence, which is the worship that makes evident man's bondage to Allāh alone. Furthermore, human activity involves both acts of worship [*'ibāda*] and human relationships [*mu'āmalāt*]. A Muslim should not fulfill one and disregard the other. Rather, both are closely linked to one another in such a way that true *'ibāda* bears harmonious *mu'āmalāt*.

d. Balance [*tawāzun*]. There is a harmony that exists between what is revealed, which humans can grasp and comprehend, and that which is accepted by faith, since man has no capacity to accept it. Human beings cannot apprehend absolutely all things, thus there are things that will remain hidden to him. Faith and revelation go side by side with one another, and complement each other.

e. Positiveness [*jābiyya*]. There is a positive relation between Allāh on the one hand, and world, life and man on the other hand. This positive relation breeds from the obedience of the created world to the Creator.

f. Pragmatism [*wāqi'iyya*]. Furthermore, the Islamic vision does not lie in the level of thought alone but it is a reality to be implemented in the sphere of human action. Islām also takes into account human nature with all its strengths and weaknesses. It does not elevate nor denigrate man, but recognizes his true role in the world.

g. Unicity [*tawhīd*]. This is the foundation of all the revealed religions given to the prophets by God. What is unique to Islām is that it is the only religion that remained true to the revelation by not falsifying any single aspect. It is only Islām that affirms that there is only

one god to whom divinity alone can be ascribed and for the rest, there is only creaturehood. This assures then the fact that Allāh alone is the sole ruler, legislator, and organizer of human life and human relations in this world.

These characteristics are the guiding principles of Quṭb's Islamic vision and are to be implemented in the true Islamic society.

2. The Islamic *Umma*

Quṭb maintains that these characteristics of the Islamic vision are to be embodied in a society. He argues that there is one immutable version of Islām and that the prototype lies in the actions and events of Muḥammad's mission in Mecca and Medina. "Although the Islamic worldview [*taṣawwūr*] can be manifested in many different forms according to the needs of the time, its actual program and method [*manhaj*] must be culled from the history of the first generation of Muslims that gathered around the Prophet" (Euben 1999, 60).

The Islamic *umma* is not a remote ideal. For Quṭb, the *umma* can be revived at any historical juncture so long as the Muslims are able to grasp the necessary knowledge and follow the right path laid out by the Islamic religion (Haddad 1983, 87).

For Islām to succeed, the physical presence of the Prophet is not necessary, nor for that matter the judgment of the '*ulamā*'. Thus, the *umma* is a transcendent, a historical ideal waiting to be realized at any moment in history: "it is a demand of the present and a hope for the future" (Quṭb, *Signposts*, 105 as quoted in Euben 1999, 61).

How then can this Islamic *umma* be established?

Foremost, the path to the establishment of the *umma* lies in the change of heart in human beings. It is Quṭb's conviction that human beings must change themselves in order to change the world. For it is the individual's struggle that inaugurates the endeavor to establish Islām as a social system.

This is the nature of the faith of Islām and the mode of its operation. This is its plan for action and its method. This is the truth that Allāh wished to teach the Muslim community when He said: "*truly Allāh does not change the state of a*

people until they change that which is within themselves”; “were Allāh not to repel some people by means of others, truly the earth would be corrupted”; and “those who strive on Our account, them will We guide to our paths” (Quṭb 1999, 3).

Then it is necessary to form the *jamā'a*, which is the dynamic nucleus of the Islamic process based on the prophetic precedence. The *jamā'a* is the coalition of believers bonded together towards the specific goal of establishing the sovereignty of God into this world. It comes into being when at least three individuals believe in this ideology and set themselves apart from the social system that they live in.

This *jamā'a* discerns the nature of the *jāhili* society, understanding its multiple sources of power. Then it points out the ills of the *jāhili* society and witnesses to a life ordained by God. In doing so, the second phase is reached: they elicit a reaction of oppression [*ẓulm*]. And this develops the awareness of the duality of the world: those that belong to the party of God and to the party of the Satan.

It is brought into being by a group of people undertaking the task, believing in it completely and conforming to it as closely as possible, trying to bring it into being in the hearts and lives of others too; striving to this end with all they possess. They struggle against human weakness and human passion within themselves, they struggle against those whom weakness and passion impel to resist divine guidance. They attain thereby, in the realization of the divine path, a point made possible by human nature and permitted material realities. They begin with man as he stands and do not neglect his actual state and demands as he passes through and traverses the stages of the divinely ordained path (Quṭb 1999, 3).

With this realization comes the distantiation of the *jamā'a* from the *jāhili* society. And this third phase is now called the *hijra*, recalling the original flight of the Prophet and his Companions to Medina. During this period, the *jamā'a* becomes more integrated and the level of consciousness is increased.

This group will triumph over their own souls and those of others at times, and at other times will be routed by their

own souls and those of others, in accordance with the efforts they expend and the means they choose for the battle, suitable for the circumstances and the needs of the age. More important in determining victory or defeat is however the degree to which they truly, in themselves, represent this path, and are able to give it practical expression in their personal conduct and behavior (Quṭb 1999, 3).

The final stage occurs during the victory and consolidation of power of the *jamā'a*. It signals also the restoration of Islām and the establishment of the *umma*. However, to restore Islām and establish the *umma*, it is necessary to engage in political action. The final stage can only be brought about by *jihād*.

3. Political Action: The Necessity of *Jihād*

Quṭb describes Islām as a set of guiding principles and at times portrays it also as an agent with purpose and will. History is thus an arena of battle between the forces of Allāh and the forces of Satan [*Iblīs*], between faith and unbelief. In this arena of battle, human beings are called to take side, for it is only in human action, in the participation of human beings in the flow of history, that the virtuous society is brought about. "God's will alone guarantees the victory of the *umma*, but it is a necessity that human beings coordinate their activities with those of the divinity" (Euben 1999, 73). Human beings must align themselves with Allāh to bring about the ideal Islamic community.

While Quṭb states that the essential character of Islām is peace, and Islām rejects all the justifications for war in the world such as nationalism, racism, greed, and economic expansion (Haddad 1983, 83), he nonetheless affirms that the only legal war in Islām is one that is fought while striving to secure the dominance of the word of God in the world. Therefore, there must be a sense of activism. And this activism is *jihād*. For Quṭb, this is the liberating force that sets human free and enables them to align with Allāh in bringing about His reign on earth.

Jihād, however, is not only defensive in nature, but is unapologetically offensive.

"Le jihād, affirme-t-il, n'est pas une guerre défensive, comme le disent certains 'musulmans', mais offensive... Elle est la révolution totale contre toute souveraineté des hommes, en toute ses formes, tous ses régimes, toutes ses lois... (en vue d'assurer) la réalisation pratique du message sous la forme d'un régime assurant le gouvernement des hommes selon la arī'a" (Borrmans 1987, 24).

Islām confronts the forces that impedes its right and obligation in three ways:

- a. People are invited to join Islām, the final religion, the way of truth, the law that realizes justice for all people.
- b. If they refuse, they are asked to pay *jizya* [poll tax] as a symbol of the cessation of hostilities and their affirmation of the freedom of Muslims to propagate their faith.
- c. If they still refuse, then the only option left is war since the enemies of Islām would be fighting God's will, keeping humanity from enjoying the benefits that accrue from the Islamic order (Haddad 1983, 84).

Accordingly, *jihād* operates on two levels: the ideological and the practical. In the ideological level, in the realm of ideas and beliefs, preaching and persuasion are the weapons of *jihād*. In the practical level, the sword is necessary to remove the political, social, and economic obstacles to the establishment of the Islamic *umma*. This use of the sword is justified not only in the Qur'ān and in the life of the Prophet, but also by the social structures of power operative in the secular world today. Quṭb sarcastically concedes that the "oppressors of Allāh's servants and the usurpers of Allāh's authority on Earth will not relinquish their power merely through argument and rhetoric" (Quṭb, *Signposts*, 60-61 as quoted in Euben 1999, 75). Thus, it is necessary to use force to vanquish the existing condition of *jāhiliyya*.

Quṭb asserts that there is no coercion or compulsion in religion. However, compulsion comes into being against those who oppose Islām. It is justified in the pursuit of liberation from slavery. Islām does not

only have the right, but also the obligation to actualize human freedom. In this way, Islām has placed certain responsibilities upon the Muslims. And these include:

- a. It is the duty of the Muslims to protect the believers that they do not stray away from the religion, permitting the use of force to repel force.
- b. Islām must be guaranteed freedom of propagation, otherwise it becomes incumbent on the Muslims to “eradicate” any oppressive powers on the earth which impedes the *da'wa* of Muslims.
- c. Muslims must be able to affirm God's sovereignty by legislating laws.
- d. Muslims must be free to establish the great justice that all people may enjoy its benefits (Haddad 1983, 84).

Thus, all Muslims are enjoined to fight against oppression and injustice wherever they are.

Mawdūdī's writings on *jihād* greatly influenced Quṭb and quotes him in condemning the narrow Western view of *jihād* as merely violence and savagery. For Quṭb, *jihād* is a practical matter and an essential characteristic of Islām as commanded in the Qur'ān.

Il est nécessaire à l'Islām d'avoir un ordre public; il est donc nécessaire à l'Islām d'user de la force; le jihād, donc, est indispensable à l'Islām, il fait partie de sa nature, puisque sans lui, l'Islām ne survivrait pas (Borrmans 1987, 25).

C. The Ideal Islamic State

Quṭb refuses to provide a blueprint for the institutions of an Islamic state. His reason for doing so is that this project might only fall to the trap which other human institutions have fallen into. What is important for Quṭb is that the actualization of an Islamic state rests upon the *ṣahāda*, that is, the belief that there is no God but Allāh. The organizational detail of the community follows upon the realization of its needs, and recognition of its conditions and situational context. “Islām does not posit hypothetical problems in order

to prescribe solutions for them. Rather, it considers tangible conditions in a concrete society that has already submitted to God's law" (Quṭb, *Signposts*, 34 as quoted in Euben 1999, 77). Quṭb believes that Islām is dynamic and beyond intellectualism. It is a religious doctrine oriented towards action.

Although Quṭb did not give a detailed system of organization of the Islamic state, it is still possible to identify several of its features.

1. *al-Šarī'a*: the Sole Source of Sovereignty

According to God, man's submission to God is expressed in the establishment of *šarī'a* as the sole source of sovereignty. *Šarī'a* is the sum of all prohibitions and regulations derived from the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*. To think of *šarī'a* as merely the legislations concerning legal matters would be to limit its scope and extent. *Šarī'a* covers even moral matters. "In fact, *šarī'a* is perceived as infallible legislation for almost all aspects of human existence and so governs the seemingly disparate realms of religious belief, practice, and observance of the law" (Euben 1999, 62). Everything that God has decreed for the organization of human life is included in the *šarī'a*. And this includes all the principles of faith, the principles of justice, morality, human behavior and knowledge. "It also includes instructions concerning all social, economic, political, ethical, intellectual as well as aesthetic aspects of life (Haddad 1983, 89).

For a nation to be Islamic, it must establish *šarī'a* as the sole basis of all laws, whether public and private. It is *šarī'a* that defines the state sanctioned by God. And the behavior of the believers are brought into conformity with God's will through obedience of these laws, whether great or small.

2. The Role of the Government

In an Islamic state, all human activity is regulated by divine law. Therefore, the government is no longer necessary for legislation. Its role is only for administration. Its primary purpose is to ensure social justice in the society. Thus, it enforces pre-existing rules and regulations in the *šarī'a*.

The government is responsible for the maintenance of the weakest members of the society. According to Quṭb, Islām allows private property. But since ownership is understood to be stewardship, then the government has the right to redistribute such property as it sees fit. The government has the duty to watch over every one of its members, making sure that everyone submits to divine law, enforcing rules related to prayer and worship; prohibitions against usury, monopoly, gambling, drinking, and prostitution; and punishment of offenders.

When there is a case wherein the *ṣarī'a* does not explicitly say anything about it, the government may act as it sees fit. This action should still be tempered by both the letter and spirit of the *ṣarī'a*. "Reform and innovation are legitimate only to the extent that they can be justified by reference to Islamic principles and facilitate the realization of the ethico-political worldview implicit in Islamic law" (Euben 1999, 79-80). Quṭb also seems to suggest that government must be participatory, a collaborative effort between the government and the people, by appealing to the Qur'ānic principle of *ṣūrā* [mutual consultation]. However, the specifics for this kind of collaborative effort has been left open not only by Quṭb but also by the Qur'ān.

The government receives its mandate, not from the allegiance of the people, but from the one source of governance. Thus, the commitment of the government is to uphold the *ṣarī'a*. When it fails to do so, then by default, it forfeits its right to govern.

3. Liberty and Equality

Islām means man's submission to God. This "bondage" should not be seen in terms of "slavery." It is not a submission of a slave to a master, but a free act of a human being towards his origin, and is meant to fulfill his being human. The liberty that Islām offers to man is basically the freedom *from* any kind of human tyrannical rule. It is also freedom *from* the dominance of passion and everything that debases humanity. At the same time it is a freedom *for* God, a submission to membership of the divine community.

By adherence to the same law, to the same *ṣarī'a*, all Muslims are considered equal. All are considered equal because of their common submission to the same God. Such equality however should not be taken in the sense of having the same natural right to life, liberty and property. In the Islamic worldview, there seems to be a disparity between the rights of man and women in terms of property and even in terms of having a legal personality. What Qutb means by equality is that all human beings are equally subject to God's call. It is therefore on this account that all are equal. Qutb recognizes the existence of inequalities in terms of natural endowments such as intelligence, physical strength, beauty and even gender. Such inequalities of natural endowments are, for Qutb, a justification for proportional justice (Euben 1999, 63).

Qutb insists upon the equality of man and woman. He emphasized that in Islamic societies, women are valued more than in any Western society. This is so because in Western societies, women are forced to work for pay outside their home. In Islamic societies, the place of the woman is the home, taking care of her husband and children. The family, for Qutb, is the repository of everything from intergenerational continuity to the moral status of an entire civilization (Euben 1999, 65). Women, therefore, have this privileged status of keeping both the physical life and moral welfare of the Muslims intact. Aside from this, Qutb also insists that women are equal in the most important aspect, that is, in terms of piety and religiosity. There is no such thing as natural superiority of men over women. The inequality in gender stems not from nature but from practical and social circumstances, taking also into account the differences in natural or biological endowments between men and women. For example, men are to inherit twice as that of the women because men conventionally bear the economic burden of keeping the family. Men are more able in terms of intellectual capacities because they are able to develop them being freed from the care of household chores. Women tend to be emotional due to the nature of family duties where her emotional and passionate sides are harnessed. In line with this argument, Qutb also rejects unequivocally the supposed inherent inequality between races.

Liberty and equality are therefore premised upon submission to God's will through membership of the Islamic community, and consequently, this is a prerequisite and at the same time a fulfillment of the Islamic *umma*.

4. Science and Technology

In the Islamic state, the pursuit of material progress is not impeded. Rather it is promoted, so long as it is for the welfare of human beings, and the mastery of the material world.

But this does not mean that we should neglect material progress. We should also give our full attention and effort in this direction, not because at this stage it is an essential requirement for attaining the leadership of mankind, but because it is an essential condition for our very existence; and Islām itself, which elevates man to the position of vice-regent of God on earth, and which, under certain conditions, considers the responsibilities of this vice-regency as the worship of God and the purpose of man's creation, makes material progress obligatory-for us (Quṭb 1990, 8).

For Quṭb, there are two types of sciences: physical and philosophical. He readily accedes that physical science, which includes, physics, astronomy, medicine, military arts and technology, are not only permissible but also necessary for the functioning of a modern Islamic society. Material progress is a divine command, a prerequisite for social justice, and a condition of the human vice-regency.

But Quṭb is cautious of the philosophical sciences, which he considers as the cornerstone of *jāhili* authority. Quṭb believes that the philosophical sciences went beyond what they were intended to be. In *The Islamic Concept and its Characteristics* (1991), he explains that "Islamic philosophy was developed as a way to negotiate and resolve religious disputes arising from the spread of Islām and the concomitant influx of new cultural mores and concerns into an ever-expanding Islamic community" (Euben 1999, 70). From that original function it deviated over time, with philosophical experts claiming that philosophy is an activity of intrinsic worth and reward, and independent from Qur'ānic sources. For Quṭb then, such claim

poses a double disaster to Islām. First, it signals the corrosion of Islām by foreign cultures, philosophy being the preoccupation of the ancient Greeks and the scholastic Christians. Second, philosophy takes upon itself the questioning of the meaning of human existence, and this is an encroachment on the realm of divine authority.

Quṭb then abhors philosophical reasoning, and argues that philosophy is incompatible with Islām, because it deifies reason and its ascendancy means the eclipse of religious meaning. For Quṭb, the only legitimate function of reason is to enable us to understand and enact God's precept and thus to fulfill the role of God's vice-regent on Earth (Quṭb, *The Islamic Concept and its Characteristics*, 52 as quoted in Euben 1999, 70). Beyond that however, the use of reason is contemptible.

5. "Islamic Nationalism"

During the time of Quṭb, nationalist rhetoric spiced with socialist slogans was in fashion. Political oratory in the Muslim world was filled with Western notions such as nationalism, nation-state, and fathers of nation. What did Quṭb say about these concepts?

For Quṭb, it is clear that the concept of nation is nothing but a membership to a land where *ṣarī'a* is established. The concept of a nation as emphasized by Western thinkers is not the same as conceived by Quṭb. For him, nationality goes beyond the categories of culture and land. For a Muslim, his nationality is his belief.

A Muslim has no country except that part of the earth where the *ṣarī'a* of God is established and human relationships are based on the foundation of relationship with God; a Muslim has no nationality except his belief, which makes him a member of the Muslim community in *dār al-Islām*. (Quṭb 1990, 103).

Furthermore, this nationality based on belief goes beyond the limits of family or blood relationship. What defines relationship should not be kinship, but the basis should be the belief in one and the same God. If family relationship goes in the way of our belief, our relationship with our family takes a step back and our faith takes precedence over anything else.

A Muslim has no relationship with his mother, father, brother, wife and other family members except through their relationship with the Creator, and then they are also joined through blood.... However, Divine relationship does not prohibit a Muslim from treating his parents with kindness and consideration, in spite of differences of belief, as long as they do not join the front lines of the enemies of Islām. However, if they openly declare their alliance with the enemies of Islām, then all the filial relationships of a Muslim are cut off and he is not bound to be kind and considerate to them (Quṭb 1990, 103).

Thus the call to *jihād* covers even family relationships. It is actually faith not blood that establishes relationship with one another.

VI. Epilogue: Quṭb as an Islamic Fundamentalist Ideologue

It is quite convenient to label Quṭb as a fundamentalist ideologue because of his going back to the roots of Islām by putting the Qur'ān into its proper elevated place and also by alluding to the social model during the time of the Prophet and his Companions, which he sought to replicate in his own times.

The aim of Quṭb is to recapture the essence of Islām, and insists on the undiluted supremacy of divine authority as the true Islamic foundations. He is attacking the prevailing social systems of his time, which according to him have failed to provide for mankind the perfection he seeks. His tirade included the so-called "Islamic governments" of his time because, according to him, they have tried to imitate the Western models and that is the reason for their failure. His diatribe is not merely against the social structures but also their underlying philosophy. For Quṭb, these structures are all the same in undermining the authority of God, and the usurpation of it by man.

Many scholars on fundamentalism rightly assert that the fundamentalist movements have a symbiotic relationship with modernity. The experience of modernity has forced people to reassess their religious values in face of the increasing worldly and wordy hegemony. Armstrong (2000, xvi) rightly notes that people feel alie-

nated and lost when fundamental changes in their society make the world strange and unrecognizable.

However, for fundamendalists, it is not just a search for meaning or trying to make sense out of a world that has become alien to them or mere conventional political struggle. For fundamentalists, the experience of modernity, and now the advancing threat of globalization, is a struggle that has evolved into a cosmic war between the forces of good and evil. And for Quṭb, the struggle is taking place here and now.

Quṭb emphasizes the primacy of the text of the Qur'ān, saying that the verses themselves are clear and free of any literary or interpretive conundrum. In fact, Quṭb would assure his readers that he is not interpreting the Qur'ān. His reading of the Qur'ān, he claims, is not a "version" at all. And the Islām that he offers is the Islām undiluted by foreign or *jahiliyya* sources.

While Quṭb's aim of recapturing the timeless essence of Islām is commendable, his approach, however, is questionable. Quṭb's essentialist discourse tries to absolutize the meaning of Islām according to his own terms. And by claiming that he is not proposing his own terms in doing so, he is actually putting forward an anti-hermeneutic stance. And this is what clearly marks him as a fundamentalist. As Euben (1999, 88) aptly puts it, "the denial that an interpretation is an interpretation is a crucial characteristic of what it means to be a 'fundamentalist.'"

This anti-hermeneutic stance of Quṭb places him in an epistemologically-privileged and monolith position. It makes his view of the Qur'ān and Islām the only view that must be followed by all believers. In doing so, he silences all critique and closes all discussion about relevant questions. This is really what makes fundamentalists rather dangerous, that they close themselves to discourse and dialogue.

The way to understanding is best achieved through the dialogic model, where both parties open up to discourse and critique. Their interpretation of whatever they hold as the meaning and value of life are not placed beyond discussion. Rather they are laid on the table for greater understanding and wider clarification. It is impossible

to dialogue with those who have regarded their own ideas as absolute and are the sole perfect path for human action.

Quṭb is indeed labeled as a fundamentalist ideologue, not merely because of his return to the “fundamentals,” but also because of his essentialist and absolutist conception of what Islām is. And this begs another inquiry. Why would an intellectual and literary man like him close himself from any discourse and critique?

Some clues to the answer of this inquiry can be glimpsed from the many painful experiences that Quṭb has undergone all throughout his life. Perhaps, these experiences are not only his own, but that of others too, which he had witnessed with his very own eyes. There is always a reason for the shift in Quṭb’s thought. His initial focus on literary criticism turned to issues on social justice when he saw that his people are living in misery. It was furthermore strengthened when he saw for himself that the socialist government of Nasser was not the solution to the cries of his people. And when finally, he himself experienced the wrath of his own government, he was seemingly forced to turn to radical ideas, even close to branding his own government as un-Islamic. There are discernible turning points in Quṭb’s thought. And these are all marked with injustice and violence.

The experience of unbridled violence in one’s life creates the impression that one’s own life and values are consequently under severe threat. And when one is threatened, he will do everything to preserve those that he holds dear. Call it animal instinct, but it is an instinct that is present in every living creature. Furthermore, the experience of violence breeds the same violence and the desire to do the same to others. Violence begets violence.

Quṭb had experienced extreme violence during his lifetime, and this must have forced him to go back to the fundamentals, not only to search for meaning, but also to preserve what he holds dear, and to fight what he thinks as the march of the forces of evil.

Thus, there is a necessity for justice and peace as the ground for dialogue. Justice and peace would also engender equity, and this will make the dialogue partners feel that they are on same plane. Only then can dialogic understanding happen. □

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GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS

- ‘ālim* / *‘ulamā’* – the singular form, *‘ālim*, refers to a learned man while collectively, *ulamā’*, it refers to religious teachers.
- da‘wa* – lit. a call or invocation. It is now used to designate Islamic missionary activity.
- dār al-Islām* – lit. Land of Islam. A place where Islam is practiced and its edicts are fully promulgated. The opposite is *dār al-ḥarb*, land of warfare, a place belonging to infidels and which has not been subdued by Islām.
- ḥadīṭ* – lit. tradition. They are records of what the prophet Muḥammad said, what he did, what he enjoined and that which was done in his presence and which he did not forbid. They also include the authoritative sayings and doings of the Companions of the Prophet.
- hijra* – lit. migration. Historically, it refers to the departure of Muḥammad from Mecca to Medina. This also signaled the start of the Muslim era or calendar.
- ‘ibāda* – acts of worship
- Iblīs* – satan or devil
- ijābiyya* – positiveness
- jāhiliyya* / *jāhili* – lit. ignorance, ignorant. Historically, it refers to the condition of ignorance of pre-Islamic Arabia.
- jamā‘a* – group
- jihād* – lit. an effort or a striving. Mystical writers of Islām refer to two kinds of jihād: the “greater,” which is against one own’s self, its lusts and weaknesses; and the “lesser,” which is the warfare against infidels.
- jizya* – poll tax. It is levied by Islamic rulers upon subjects who are of a different faith, but claim protection.
- manhaj* – method
- mu‘āmalāt* – human relationships
- rabbāniyya* – lordship of Allāh
- shāhada* – the Islamic profession of faith, or a bearing witness that there is no deity but Allāh and Muḥammad is his prophet.
- sharī‘a* – Islamic law, which includes the teachings of the Qur’ān and the *ḥadīṭ*.
- ṣumūl* – comprehensiveness
- sunna* – lit. path or way. A term used to express the Islamic custom or manner of life.
- ṣūrā* – mutual consultation
- ṭabāt* – constancy
- taṣawwur* – Islamic worldview
- tawāzun* – balance
- tawḥīd* – a term used to express the unity of the Godhead.
- umma* – people or nation.
- wāqi‘iyya* – pragmatism
- ‘ulm* – oppression