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Source: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Jan., 1991), pp. 3-35
Published by: Cambridge University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/179007
Accessed: 24/07/2009 16:02

Smashing Idols and the State: The Protestant Ethic and Egyptian Sunni Radicalism

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Recent scholars of the Middle East have implicitly and suggestively noted similarities between contemporary Muslim activists and sixteenth-century Protestant reformers.[1] A more explicit and rigorous argument comparing Protestantism and contemporary Sunni movements in Egypt can yield insights into both movements.

Both Calvinism and the contemporary Islamist Sunni movements in Egypt are discourses on the nature of authority in society. Historically both movements arose as central state authorities made absolutist claims to political power and in the process sought to dominate transformed agrarian societies in new ways. Ideologically, both movements asserted that the claims of sweeping power by nominally religious secular central authorities were blasphemous egotism when contrasted with the claims of God on the consciences of believers. Socially, both movements transferred religious authority away from officially sanctioned individuals who interpret texts to ordinary citizens. Institutionally both movements create communities of voluntary, highly moti-

The author would like to acknowledge the encouragement and help received from Kenneth Jowitt, Kevin Reinhart, Farhat Ziadeh, and Ahmad Sadiq Sa'd.

[1] For an extremely early and suggestive insight to this problem, see Clement Henry Moore, "On Theory and Practice Among Arabs," in *World Politics*, 24:1 (1971), 106–26. Moore's concern is primarily with the Egyptian Muslim Brothers. Looking at contemporary Sunni activists, Fouad Ajami refers to them as having "[t]he perseverance of reformers and 'saints' we can admire" in *Islam in the Political Process*, James Piscatori, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 34. The reference is, of course, to Michael Walzer's *Revolution of the Saints* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), a study of Protestantism, of which more below. Nazih Ayubi argues that "[a]s in Protestantism, the importance of discarding the church's teachings and "going back to the sources" is the egalitarian and participatory ethos that makes everybody capable of understanding and interpreting the word of God without barriers based on clerical ranks or theological education." See "The Politics of Militant Islamic Movements in the Middle East," *Journal of International Affairs*, 36:2 (1982), 272. Said Amir Arjomand has also tried to relate the Shi'i-led revolution in Iran to this paradigm. See "Iran's Islamic Revolution," *World Politics*, 38:3 (1986), 384–414, especially the argument that the Shi'i 'ulama are the equivalent of Calvinist preachers (p. 390). The most sustained arguments are by Ernest Gellner. See especially "Flux and Reflux in the Faith of Men" in the collection of his essays, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

0010-4175/91/1108–9426 $5.00

vated and self-policing believers that yield greater degrees of internal cohesion and compliance than the absolutist authority can achieve and they therefore can become the basis for postabsolutist political authority in an authoritarian and antidemocratic fashion.

Although the use of the word fundamentalist is awkward and raises questions relevant primarily to Christian doctrine, it does convey something important about Protestant Christian and Sunni radical movements. Both early Protestantism and the Islamist movement seek to force believers to confront directly the authority of the basic texts of revelation and to read them directly, rather than through the intervening medium of received authority. Both believe that Scripture is a transparent medium for anyone who cares to confront it.

If both movements contain arguments about who can read and interpret Scripture, it behooves us to listen carefully to those arguments. The agenda they set forth is not economic but profoundly political: How do human beings cooperate and what role does coercion have when free consent is not forthcoming? It seems to me therefore that the fundamental or basic question in the post-Lutheran Protestant movements and in contemporary Sunni Muslim movements is an argument about public authority and the state rather than—as Max Weber would have had it—an argument about capitalism.

WEBER AND A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR RELIGIOUS CHANGE

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* Max Weber argued that shifts in religious doctrine have sociological as well as theological implications. In Weber's original formulation, Calvinism helped to forge the "spirit of capitalism," and thus the economic structure of modern capitalist Europe, because of the doctrinal features of one specific form of Protestantism (Calvinism) in regard to transcendence and human predestination.[2] It was a new and powerful form of Christianity that "placed a premium on the individual's disposition to organise coherently and control consciously his own conduct."[3]

[2] Weber was vague regarding the possibility of non-Christian religions undergoing a shift toward Protestant ethics. On the one hand, see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* Talcott Parsons, trans. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), especially 227: "Because the Mohammadan [sic] idea was that of predetermination, not predestination, the most important thing, the proof of the believer in predestination, played no part in Islam. Thus only the fearlessness of the warrior (as in the case of moira) could result, but there were no consequences for rationalization of life; there was no religious sanction for them." On the other hand, the logic of some Weberian formulations reinforces a possible comparison of Calvinism and Islam on several dimensions including that of predestination. See *Economy and Society,* Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 522. Weber's knowledge of Islam was weak in comparison to his knowledge of other religions. See Bryan Turner, *Weber and Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 140–1. A good selection on various approaches to the problems raised by Weber is S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization: A Comparative View* (New York: Basic Books, 1968). Also worth looking at is Ernest Gellner's "Trust, Cohesion, and the Social Order," in *Trust,* Diego Gambetta, ed. (London: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 152.

[3] Gianfranco Poggi, *Calvinism and the Capitalist Spirit: Max Weber's Protestant Ethic* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 78.

Modern scholars of Islam pursue the Weberian research agenda but focus on the *'ulama* (authoritative interpreters whose role and socialization will be defined below), who are dismissed as likely Protestants. Most of these attempts to expand the Weberian thesis, or even test it in non-European contexts, keep largely to the theological dimensions of the argument.[4] Weber had also argued that Protestants were institutional innovators. He recognized that there was an institutional "Protestant ethic," insofar as the organization to which Protestants were typically partial was the small group or sect through which they associated.

Pursuit of institutional and ideological arguments were not long in coming and have largely transcended arguments about Protestantism based on doctrine.[5] All share an understanding of Protestantism as a cohesive community of equal and cooperating individuals. Sheldon Wolin has argued that organization through sects carried the "potentially explosive idea that a community rests on an active membership" and included the anarchist principle that human society could be "at once well-organized, disciplined, and cohesive and yet be without a head."[6]

Michael Walzer's study of Puritan saints has found echoes in the contemporary literature on the Middle East.[7] Walzer defines Protestantism not as a doctrine but as a voluntary grouping of equals with a zealous commitment to engage in methodical and systematic struggle (including violence if need be) in order to attack customary social structures. Members who have a zealous commitment to ideologically oriented action are called "saints" by Walzer. These saints need not be religious, but are any individuals forming voluntary associations that engage in ideologically directed collective action. Walzer thus transforms Weber's arguments regarding sect organization to argue that Calvinism was historically important not only by means of sectarian organization but because of it. For Walzer, sect organization and radical political doctrine emerge in periods when social order breaks down and state structures become weak. Predictable ideological and organizational responses to disorder will, however, generate distinctive social outcomes depending on the real historical situation:

The Calvinist saints were the first of these bands of revolutionary magistrates who sought above all control and self-control. In different cultural contexts, at different

[4] The major contribution to this extension is Maxime Rodinson, *Islam and Capitalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1973), which explicitly confronts the issue at several points (notably pp. 7–9). Other contributions in the area of Islam include Ernest Gellner, "Sanctity, Puritanism, Secularization, and Nationalism," in Eisenstadt, *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization,* 289–308.

[5] For the most recent summation of this argument, see Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 465, regarding the tensions in Christianity as a system of meanings faced with emergent capitalism. For an older but still useful summary of the problems regarding the causal mechanisms involved, see Sidney A. Burrell, "Calvinism, Capitalism, and the Middle Classes: Some Afterthoughts on an Old Problem" in Eisenstadt, *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization,* 135–154.

[6] See Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little Brown, 1960), 191.

[7] *Revolution of the Saints.*

moments in time, sainthood will take on different forms and the saints will act out different revolutions.[8]

It makes sense to Walzer to compare Puritan saints, French Jacobins, and Russian Leninists because of their ideological and organizational similarities despite historical differences. His focus on institutions allows him to see a "Protestant" ethic in many more movements than does a strictly Weberian formulation.

I propose to look at contemporary Sunni activism to see if there are significant institutional and ideological similarities providing a useful comparison to Protestantism. Despite the many contextual and historical differences, such a comparison has at least two advantages. First, we are at least comparing Puritan saints with Muslim activists who both believe in a personal, all-powerful and all-knowing God—something not true of Jacobins or Bolsheviks. Second, we are comparing movements confronting not (as did Jacobins or Bolsheviks) weakened states but, on the contrary, strengthened states in which heads of state claimed unrestricted authority for themselves (which is somewhat more true of the Calvinists).

Why is authority important? Arguments about Protestantism hold it helped to destroy personal monarchies and absolutist regimes in Western Europe that emerged coeval with Protestant movements. In absolute regimes, the monarch rules as the sole source of law by means of a permanent, professional, and dependent bureaucracy and army.[9] Absolutism was a state in transition between two historical periods: one in which landed magnates possessed preponderant political and another in which urban industrial capitalists possessed such power. Protestantism destroyed the absolutist monarch's claim to power because it destroyed the mystical base for civil authority, insisting that the interpretation of scripture was the responsibility of all believers, not just officials bound by the classical corpus, and sanctioned methodical and ascetic behavior.

Given a tendency of some writers to make facile distinctions between Christianity and Islam on the basis of a supposed categorical separation of church and state in the former, a word of caution is in order.[10] Radical Protestantism worked not because it furthered the separation of church and state, but precisely because it did not. In Wolin's reading, scripture and scriptural dispute provided believers with a standard by which the action of political authority could be judged. The merger of church and state became necessary in Calvinist thought because "political and religious thought form a

[8] *Ibid.*, 310–1.

[9] See Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, 476.

[10] See, for example, Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 2: "Throughout the history of Christendom there have been two powers: God and Caesar . . . always there are two, with its own laws and jurisdictions, its own structure and hierarchy."

continuous realm of discourse."[11] Calvinism created new ideological communities of activists endowed with a theory that allowed them to withdraw their allegiance from an institutional order which was only nominally Christian:

> But in the obedience which we have shown to be due to the authority of governors, it is always necessary to make one exception, and that is entitled to our first attention—that it do not seduce us from obedience to him, to whose will the desires of all kings ought to be subject, to whose decrees all their commands ought to yield, to whose majesty all their sceptres ought to submit. . . . If they command any thing against him, it ought not to have the least attention; nor, in this case, ought we to pay any regard to all that dignity attached to magistrates.[12]

Calvin's words resonate with earlier Christian thought, and we can find a similar note in the classical Islamic *hadith* literature, although it formed a minor note. Ibn ʿUmar reported that "to hear and obey [the authorities] is binding so long as one is not commanded to disobey (God); when one is commanded to disobey (God), he shall not hear or obey."[13]

What we wish then to look at is twofold. First, have contemporary "fundamentalist" groups made the same kind of break with customary and received religious authority that the Puritans did? Second, if so, what are the implications of this break? I propose to look first at how some Protestant believers looked at authority and community in the context of earlier Christian thought and then to do the same for contemporary Egyptian Muslims. As a form of religious authority, Calvinism will be defined as a refusal to accept received interpretations of the texts of revelation and a refusal to accept the authority of the old interpreters as well.

THE PROTESTANT PROBLEMATIC

For Christian and Muslim believers there is a fundamental dilemma regarding the institutional stability of a visible community of believers. This dilemma arises because humanity once had direct contact with an omnipotent and omniscient divinity who continues to hold fallible men and women responsible for their actions despite the partial, imperfect, and limited nature of their understanding. Believers are the legatees of an institutional framework that claims historical continuity with revelation but which seems to lack the emotional basis to make its claims binding.

Between the institutional and intellectual task of maintaining historical

[11] Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 179.

[12] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Allen, trans. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), IV,20,xxxii, 804–5. [The numbers for Calvin's *Institutes* in this and subsequent citations represent, in order, the particular book, chapter, and paragraph.]

[13] See Maulana Muhammad Ali, *A Manual of Hadith* (London: Curzon Press, 1944), 396; The *hadith* is from Bukhari, 56:108. In Arabic the word for "disobeying" (*maʿsiyyah*) has overtones of revolt, sin, and seduction somewhat similar to Calvin's wording. [Imam Bukhari's *Sahih* is widely considered to be an important classical edition of *hadith*, and Maulana's numbers refer to a book and chapter in which a particular hadith can be found.]

continuity and the emotional task of creating anew the reception of revelation lies a significant religious space. To paraphrase Abdul Hamid el-Zein, the late anthropologist and student of Islam, the analyst cannot privilege the intellectual activity of systematic interpretation over that of "direct insight" into the order of the world.[14] We can only investigate how believers carry out these tasks. For my purposes, Protestantism involves the development of earlier Christian thought around four dimensions (which I shall later elaborate in terms of Islam). Protestantism brought new answers to four old questions inherent in Christianity (and perhaps any monotheism) and Protestants found themselves in a state of tension—if not war—with human society. Mastering themselves and society required thinking about four issues:

(1) the claims due a single and all-powerful God by believers;
(2) the recognition of the danger that there exist loyalties antagonistic to God;
(3) the nature of education, socialization, and authority required to interpret the Scripture and determine what actions validly fulfill divine claims; and (consequently)
(4) the relation of revealed Scripture to received interpretations of it.

The emergent themes in Protestantism and contemporary Sunni radicalism recapitulate and transform earlier conflicts in their respective thought. Calvin's position on God's claims over man was simple enough in outline: "The purpose of creation is for man to know God and to glorify him by worship and obedience."[15] In Calvin's own words, "the worship of God is therefore the only thing which renders men superior to brutes, and makes them aspire to immortality."[16] What is worship? It is not merely a practice but the direct confrontation of God and His Word as the apostles or prophets or saints had done. When this occurs, the meaning of Scripture becomes apparent without institutional mediation:

> How shall we be persuaded of its divine original, unless we have recourse to the decree of the Church? This is just as if any one should inquire, How shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? For the Scripture exhibits as clear evidence of its truth, as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things of taste.[17]

For the Reformers, the Reformation was not a social movement with mundane goals, but the reemergence of the spirit which men felt who had lived when God's presence was manifest:

> [T]he Reformation is not to be confused with any earlier worthy attempts which men undertook to put right the faults in the church or in Christendom. It is rather the work

[14] See "Beyond Ideology and Theology: the Search for the Anthropology of Islam," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 6 (1977), 227–54, especially at 248–52.

[15] Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 197.

[16] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I,3,iii [hereafter indicated by *Institutes*].

[17] *Ibid.*, I,7,ii.

of Christ himself . . . the reformation message is identical with the preaching of Jesus and his disciples, and actually transports us into the situation faced by the early church.[18]

The Reformation and Calvinism recapitulated some doctrinal and institutional forms of earlier Christian movements. The sixteenth century was not the first time Christians had turned to the Apostles for models. In the twelfth century, devout European Christians viewed the *vita apostolica* as a framework for "the return to the primitive life of the church, to the life of the Apostles . . . [which] by inspiring new states of life, inspired as well a new awareness of the ways that grace could take root in nature."[19] In the Middle Ages, an

evangelical awakening took place not by a revision of existing institutions but by a return to the gospel that by-passed those institutions . . . [whose] dynamics had to be: witness to the faith, fraternal love, poverty, the beatitudes—all these were to operate more spontaneously and sooner among laymen than among clerics, who were bound within an institutional framework. The risk could be great—and in this case it was great—that laymen would grossly abuse their evangelical liberty, for once on the way to imitating the apostles, they would claim the right to teach derived from that liberty.[20]

In the twelfth century the Church could avoid this risk; in the sixteenth it could not.

In the Reformation the Apostles ceased to be men whose lives were to be emulated; collectively they became models for a new form of governance which allowed the evangelical movement to re-create a community receiving a Scripture rather than one without it. The systematic emulation of the Apostles was coupled with congregational activity which allowed constant collective scrutiny to create high levels of individual compliance with religious norms.

Why was it so necessary to link congregationalism to the systematic following of the call of Jesus? Because, although salvation was granted to individuals, human social activity created the possibility of error and damnation.[21] The Protestants were not concerned that the visible church might fail to lead men to salvation; they were more concerned that it might systematically lead them away.[22] Obedience to the letter and form of revelation could easily become submission to idolatrous and nondivine claims. Men and women

[18] Gottfried W. Locher, *Huldrych Zwingli's Concept of History* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 102.

[19] See M. D. Chenu, "Monks, Canons, and Laymen in Search of the Apostolic Life" in *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 203.

[20] Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society*, 219.

[21] *Institutes*, I,iv.

[22] *Institutes*, IV,i,iv–v, and IV,ii,ii–iii, and especially: "The communion of the Church was not instituted as a bond to confine us in idolatry, impiety, ignorance of God, and other evils; but rather as a means to preserve us in the fear of God, and obedience of the truths."

tended almost invariably, it seemed, not to worship God's truth and authority but human law and human power.

Norms arising from human law and power are idolatrous, because idolatry is the interposition of human and humanist values between the believer and the divine. The struggle against idolatry was not limited to iconoclasm; images were only one form of idolatry. Another form was manifest in the government of the Catholic Church itself, in which Calvin saw "chaplains, canons, deans, provosts, and other idlers . . . [who] falsely usurp the honour, and thus violate the sacred institution of Jesus Christ."[23] If idolatry could be found within the church itself, it was possible that people who appeared to be good Christians actually were not and that figures of religious or civil authority were not entitled to respect.

For early Protestants like Ulrich Zwingli, *the* critical question of the age was whether or not customary religiously sanctioned practices were in accord with the revealed word of God. "The question for Zwingli was no longer one of rejecting the misuse of 'good and honorable customs' . . . but rather of separating human customs from divine ordinances."[24] The church and its received doctrines derived from interpretation of the Bible were not merely inefficient or ineffective customs to be cast off; rather they were themselves symbols of idolatry. Calvin certainly developed this aspect of Protestant thought to an extreme degree in the *Institutes* and asserted that "Scripture settles all questions and describes the truth [in] . . . detail [sic]."[25] At stake was not nominal controversy but the very essence of monotheist religion: "As often as the Scripture asserts that there is one God, it is not contending over the bare name, but also prescribing that nothing belonging to his divinity be transferred to another."[26]

Once the Scripture itself becomes the basis for decisions about ethics, morality, and what is required of Christians rather than a received body of interpretations, a significant decentralization of authority occurs. The logic of argument then discards not only that received interpretation of Scripture (that is, canon law and the entire range of church discourse built up in the medieval period) but also implies that interpreters no longer need socialization in the old educational institutions.

Socialization and education into the priesthood is a threat to the Protestant community and a derogation of the principles upon which it is built. The very preparation for entry into the priesthood for Calvin marks the deformation of the intended function of the pastorate; the role of canons marks the deformation of the presbytery; and the dictatorship of the bishops and the Pope marks the extinction of the active participation of the Christian in the Church. Cal-

[23] *Institutes*, IV,5,x.
[24] Eire, *War Against the Idols*, 54.
[25] *Ibid.*, 202.
[26] *Institutes*, I,12,1.

vin's critique of church government is far more scathing that his critique of civil government. Priests, Calvin tells us, do not know Scripture; they know only canon law.[27]

Protestantism was a directly powerful and compelling doctrine in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Congregationalism and the possibility of a direct reading of the Scriptures gave legitimacy to lay theology and the pamphlet explosion that began as early as the first decades of the sixteenth century. City dwellers demanded religious reforms in order to preserve social community and sought an apostolic vocation, which implied that believers entered society and engaged in "admonishing one's brother against sin and warning him to repent."[28] Along with his fellow communicants, the believer henceforth was engaged in a constant struggle against idolatry and to obey the word of God in ways that required ever-increasing levels of knowledge of Scripture and a willingness to renounce received interpretations of it. To paraphrase Ulrich Zwingli, the believer was henceforth in a company of soldiers whose Captain was Christ.

THE MUSLIM OFFICIAL CONSENSUS: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although there is no Islamic church, we can nevertheless identify a potential tension between the "visible community of believers" and the "invisible" or eternal community of believers. It is possible to identify a set of religious concepts in contemporary Sunni Islam that at least make it possible to examine a correspondence with Puritanism. I would like to suggest that these concepts are (1) *jihad* (the nature of the activity to which believers are called), (2) *taghut* (the existence of competing claims over the behavior of believers), (3) *ijmaʿ* (a relationship between Scripture and received interpretations of it), and (4) the role of the ʿulama (the nature of the socialization and education required for interpreting the Scripture). The role of the ʿulama differs from that of the priesthood in many ways, not least of which is the absence of an established orthodoxy which they were to uphold.[29]

Although Sunni Islam lacks a charismatically endowed hierarchy, Sunni Muslims have developed a sophisticated methodology for understanding Scripture, for evaluating it, and for extending the logic of its arguments. The science of Scripture is called *ʿilm*. Those who practice ʿilm are known as ʿulama, that is, those who know. In general the methodology mastered by these men (and they are all men) is jurisprudential knowledge.

[27] *Institutes* IV,v,ii.

[28] Paul Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation: Popular Pamphleteers in Southwest Germany 1521–1525* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 222. Russell himself quotes Hans Sachs, an early sixteenth-century pamphleteer.

[29] William Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 20.

Without a single well-defined hierarchy with clear disciplinary capacities (such as found in the Catholic Church), ʿulama could all arrive at different interpretations of Scripture. Only cooperation can avert the absolute fragmentation of the legal corpus whose mastery defines the ʿulama. Thus the doctrine developed that "where . . . conclusions were the subject of general agreement by the scholars, they then become incontrovertible and infallible expressions of God's law."[30] This general agreement is called ijmaʿ. Over time the mastery of the methodology and content of ijmaʿ itself outweighs by far the effort required to master the Scripture.[31]

Historically Sunni Muslims were enjoined as individual Muslims to the performance of five acts: the witness to the faith or *shahadah* (recognition of one God and Muhammad's prophecy), prayer, a ritual fast, the payment of alms, and pilgrimage. These essentially formal requirements establish the bounds for membership in a visible community of believers. Those who perform these rituals are members of both a visible community and possibly members of the "invisible" community of Muslims who achieve Paradise. Historically jihad was not considered to be a duty incumbent on all believers; it usually referred to relations between the Muslim community and other communities rather than within the Muslim community itself.[32]

Jihad has become a critical concept for contemporary Sunni Egyptian activists and may well be *the* critical concept for them. To the degree that these activists are like the Protestant reformers, their concepts of jihad should be markedly different from earlier understandings. Constant recognition of the supremacy of God and methodical service to Him should merge with a growing sense of antagonism to a purely nominal adherence to Islam. In succeeding sections I shall present some arguments that this is indeed the case.

Jihad is no longer thought of as a particular act or event, but it is the positive pole in a continuum in which believers orient themselves to action. Such a definition of jihad entails another concept: that of a negative pole in the continuum. There must be a competing and antagonistic claim regarding the behavior of believers.[33] Evil, the danger of a competing claim, should be understood in terms of a theology of human egoism rather than in naturalist terms. Idolatry is the principle of moral orientation that competes with God rather than the physical presence of Satan. One of the few studies of jihad as a

[30] Noel Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964), 78.

[31] See *The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* [hereafter, *EI*], H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers, ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), *s.v.* "Idjmaʿ" (pp. 157–8).

[32] *Ibid.*, *s.v.* "djihad" (p. 89).

[33] Gustave von Grunebaum argued that an inherent complementarity of good and evil could be found in classical Islamic theology that "conceived of evil as the *muqabal* of good, that is, its correlative opposite, and hence possessed of equal ontological reality." Today's militants take the existential implications of such a position quite seriously. See Gustave von Grunebaum, "Observations on the Muslim Concept of Evil," *Studia Islamica*, 31 (1970), 117–34 [reprinted in *Islam and Medieval Hellenism: Social and Cultural Perspectives*, Dunning S. Wilson, ed. (London: Variorum Reprints, 1976), article XIV, p. 124.

concept in development affirms precisely such a differentiation over time—namely that for contemporary fundamentalists, "The important objects of jihad are . . . : an end to the domination of man over man and of man-made laws, the recognition of Allah's sovereignty alone, and the acceptance of the *shari'ah* as the only law."[34] Human egoism expressed in ordinary politics is designated by the Sunni activists as *taghut*—idolatry. Succeeding sections will show that the growing reliance on the concept of taghut is a "quasi-Protestant" shift in Muslim thought. The choice of the word taghut to refer to idolatry, rather *sanam* or *iblis* (which would refer to Satan), will be adduced to support this view.

Before doing so, let me briefly pursue the logic of the argument. Concern with jihad and taghut is not only a concern with the nature of the relationship of the egotistical individual to God, but it also challenges the received meaning of these concepts and implies a radical redefinition of the present Muslim community to its past and to the guardians of received knowledge from that past. Redefining what is required of the community of believers necessitates redefining the requirements for interpreting Scripture. It suggests that the monopoly over received interpretations must be broken.

Contemporary Sunni radicals attack the well-developed and sophisticated consensus of the 'ulama on two levels: First, they deny that the prior meanings are correct; and second, they deny the very right of such scholars to determine the meanings. This double attack on the 'ulamas' interpretations and their right to define them makes contemporary Sunni activism comparable to the Protestant impulse in Europe. A refusal to accept received interpretations means a return to the origins: Scripture. Denying the institutional integrity of the established religious elite challenges the kind of education, socialization, and authority required to interpret the Scripture.

To argue that the contemporary Islamic movement mounts a radical attack on received Islam requires the establishment of two prior arguments: We must first show that the ideas being discussed have an earlier provenance. Without prior dialogue, we might be looking at an imported idea rather than a conceptual break. Second, we must demonstrate that this break had not already occurred, even though contemporary activists were intellectually nourished by earlier debates. What follows is an attempt to trace the origins of the "Protestant" break with the immediate past and to provide a context for understanding the nature of the contemporary Egyptian Islamist discourse.

NEARING THE EDGE

In his sermons and written work, Hasan al-Banna, founder of the Society of Muslim Brothers (*Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) discussed many of the questions that concerned Sunni radicals in the 1930s and 1940s. Al-Banna's Broth-

[34] Rud Peters, *Islam and Colonialism: The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 130. Peters uses the terms "modernist" and "fundamentalist" to distinguish those who might also be differentiated as "humanist" and "fundamentalist."

erhood was the historic cradle of contemporary Islamic activism, and the personal connections between him and the present activists obscure the critical difference between them. Al-Banna was not a "Protestant," although this has been suggested.[35]

Al-Banna was concerned that Quranic inspiration enter the daily life of Muslims. He perceived a widespread flagging of emotional commitment to Islam but expected a solution from the existing political elite. He specifically addressed this problem in the sermon "*Nazrat fi islah al-nafs*" (Remarks on Self-reform), with its striking central image of electricity:

> Why did the Noble Qur'an have such an impact on our worthy ancestors and why was it so beneficial to them but not to us? Why did the verses [of the Qur'an] affect our minds in so weak a fashion? Let me direct your attention to someone who creates electricity and must feel the electric current. This effect will vary with the force of the current, and if it is strong enough will put someone who comes into contact with it into the hospital and if it is stronger yet will put him in the grave [he then discusses similar physical effects on early converts to Islam] . . . if the effect of Qur'an is not the same in us as it was in our ancestors then we are like an electrician who has put insulation between himself and the current so that he is not affected by it, and our task is to break down this insulation so that we can feel the Noble Qur'an so that our hearts will be in communication with it and we will taste its sweetness.[36]

For al-Banna, modern Muslims were emotionally insulated from the Qur'an, but he did not connect this insulation with an institutional foundation. Commitment could increase primarily through practical activity rather than through a sweeping act of faith. Even those who were only nominal Muslims could, by integration into the works of an Islamic organization, play a role in creating an Islamic society. This was so because, for al-Banna, the community of Muslims was (in Wilfred Cantwell Smith's expression) orthoprax rather than orthodox.[37]

Without naively believing in the likelihood that all would become better, al-Banna nevertheless seems to have believed that men could affect not only their mundane but their eternal destinies:

> Regarding the Islamic spirit and the Islamic personality, 90 out of 100 never fully develop it. Thus it occurred to me to give this talk on the role of self-reform and clearly explicate what it means to say if the character is changed everything will be changed "for God only changes [events] for those who change themselves." Now it is said that this is a characteristic aim of the Sufis and we are a Brotherhood of activists not masters of mysticism [*shuyukh al-turuq*]. I say we must fear lest Satan put a veil over our spirits so that we will not reach our goal.[38]

Clearly for al-Banna it was quite possible for character to be changed through action, but action was not all. Human frailty was understood to be man's

[35] See the articles by Moore and others cited above.

[36] *Al-'Itisam,* June 1944 (Cairo).

[37] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 19.

[38] Hasan al-Banna, "Nazrat fi islah al-Nafs."

choice to listen to "the power that opposes God in the hearts of men . . . [and] whispers his insidious suggestions in their ears and makes his proposals seductive to them."[39] Nevertheless, the most dangerous enemies were the colonial political power: foreign, non-Muslim rulers who controlled Muslim societies and ruled without reference to Islamic law. For al-Banna, the most dangerous characters remain foreign; they are not to be found lurking within the community of nominal believers to confound the virtuous.

Al-Banna was assassinated in 1949. For the next fifteen years, the elaboration of his ideas about the nature of human community and governance fell to Sayyid Qutb. A literary critic by training and a moderately secular liberal, Qutb returned to Egypt from a year-long stay in the United States a committed Islamic activist. From 1949 until his execution in 1966, Qutb elucidated an Islamic vision of society, governance, and community. If al-Banna was the product of the *ancien regime* and the colonial era, Qutb focused far more sharply on the nationalist state in the postcolonial era. Qutb's understanding of community and agency was profoundly conditioned by the experience of watching a powerful but nationalist state intrude into society as the colonial regime had never been capable of doing.

Qutb evokes evil as an active and insidious force identified as taghut: "deception that cannot endure the mere existence of truth . . . for even if truth wished to live in isolation from deception—leaving victory to the decision of God—deception cannot accept this situation."[40] To describe human political power, Qutb conflates two words, taghut and *tughyan*. Although given as separate forms in classical dictionaries, the two words are easy to relate in meaning. Tughyan has to do with overstepping boundaries (including "going beyond in disbelief"), whereas taghut seems to be associated with "that which is worshipped other than God."[41] The arbitrary power of the state symbolized by the Pharaoh is evoked in this conflation.

Pharaoh is, of course, as familiar a figure to Muslims as he is to Jews and Christians. In the Qur'an he usually appears in direct contrast to the prophet Moses. Pharaoh tries constantly to overstep established normative boundaries, whether by the infliction of cruelty, the use of illusive magic, or the direct appropriation of divine status.[42] For Qutb, the moment in which Moses challenges Pharaoh exemplifies the situation of real persons torn between allegiance to God and the seductions of idolatry. The essence of Islam is in this conflict:

The confrontation between Moses and Pharoah and his retinue reveals the reality of the struggle between the entirety of the religion of God and the entirety of ignorance

[39] *EI*, s.v. "shaitan," 523.

[40] Sayyid Qutb, *Fi zilal al-qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-shuruq, 1974), vol. 3, 1306.

[41] See *Taj al-arus* (Cairo ed., 1306 A.H.), *s.v. taghut*, 224–5 and *Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane*, A. J. Wensinck and J. P. Mensing *et al.*, ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), vol. 4, pp. 4–5, especially the reference to Abu Da'ud.

[42] See especially XX, 43–72 and XXVIII, 32–40 in the Qur'an.

[*jahiliyyah*]. It shows how taghut regards this religion and how it feels the threat to its existence even as it reveals how the faithful understand the conflict between themselves and taghut. . . . If God is the lord of the world then no servant of his—even haughty and tyrannical Pharaoh—can make them subject to him for they are subject to no one except the lord of the world, and return of divinity to God means the return of all government to him . . . [thus Moses's] call to the lord of the world can only have one meaning, namely withdrawal of power from the servants—*tawaghit* [plural form of taghut]—and return of it to its Master and this means (in the eyes of such people) wickedness! Or as is said today in the *jahili* ordinances in response to this same call: this is an attempt to overturn the established order! And indeed from the point of view of ignorant idols [*al-tawaghit al-jahiliyyah*] that have usurped the power of God—that is that have usurped His divinity even if they do not say it directly—this [i.e., this same call] is an overthrow of the established order.[43]

Here state power and the established order (*nizam al-hukm*) are assimilated to a set of loyalties in opposition to God. Qutb's argument is not that politics as a vocation implies choices at odds with the ultimate ethic of Islam, nor does he argue that the political is necessary but corrupting. His argument is more radical.

Qutb is arguing that the state and its leadership constitutes a glorification of human needs and desires which is idolatrous, and that the leaders of the state demand the kind of uncritical loyalty due only to God. For the state to demand such loyalty and to insist on such authority strikes a blow at the foundation of revealed monotheism and restores premonotheistic idolatry. In premonotheistic Egypt, religion and politics were one and the same; and their unity was cemented in the divine or quasidivine character of the human ruler who had a theoretical right to rule unhindered. Such a ruler places himself outside law and is an absolute ruler because he rules only "from himself."[44]

Qutb's vision of the law-governed community of Moses, in contradistinction to the unconstrained coercive power of Pharaoh, analyzes in religious terms the state structure erected by Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s, which still stands. After 1952, Egypt was a powerfully concentrated administrative regime, with Nasser himself wielding extraordinary powers unconstrained either by law or by any normal political process. Even local decentralization aided the concentration of power in Nasser's hands.[45] It was also during Nasser's lifetime that Egypt moved from being a society in which the landed elite controlled the state to one in which the urban professionals and capitalists gained significant political power.[46]

[43] Qutb, *Fi zilal al-qur'an*, 1330–1.

[44] For a discussion of Calvin's own approach to the problem of *princeps legibus solus* and insight into developing Protestant thinking on the subject, see Harro Hopfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 13–18.

[45] See Tariq al-Bishri, *Al-Dimuqratiyyah wa al-nasiriyyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafah al-Jadidah, 1975), 22–24, especially the description of Nasser's use of the power to appoint and remove high officials.

[46] See Leonard Binder, *In a Moment of Enthusiasm* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 376–7.

Qutb represents the point of departure for the present generation of Islamic militants, whom we have yet to discuss. The state ruled by Anwar Sadat was still a Nasserist state, even if the policies sometimes differed. No matter how Sadat appeared to the West, in Egypt he often seemed to be at least as dictatorial as Nasser. He was frequently more arbitrary, even if he relied less on coercion. His speech to the Israeli Knesset, which broke the war deadlock, only occurred because Sadat could disregard any normal political or constitutional restraints. Sadat also used his power to ban the sale of meat in Egypt for a month in 1980, to enforce rigid and unrealistic laws regarding business hours, and even to suggest allowing Israel access to Nile water.

Qutb's originality lies in his uncompromising vision of the Prophet's mission in Mecca rather than Medina. Qutb's Prophet does not make a new order until he has broken with the old. In this view, Islam

> is neither an Arab national program nor social, military, legal or even ethical movement. The Meccan Qur'an is nothing other than a revolution (*thawra*) of consciousness and beliefs necessary for all that followed: ethics, State, law, and social order. But this revolution of the heart was aimed at the very heart of the powers already in place: priests, tribal shaykhs, princes and local political powers, and not only at distant Persian and Byzantine despots.[47]

The Prophet and his Companions destroyed the foundations of political power in Mecca, just as Moses destroyed Pharaoh's pretensions *from within* ancient Egyptian society and only then turned to building a new one. The message is clearly that contemporary monotheists must be willing to oppose shaykhs, princes, and pharaohs within their own societies before a new order can be built.

Qutb's focus on Pharaoh gave him a vocabulary, moreover, with which to reach a much wider audience for a politics of religious criticism than any earlier thinkers did. Moses and Pharaoh have an extremely deep resonance in Egyptian folk proverbs. Almost any contemporary collection of Egyptian proverbs offers *illi ma yirda bi-hukm Musa yirda bi-hukm Fir'awn* (who will not accept the rule of Moses must accept that of Pharaoh).[48] This particular bit of folk wisdom, distinguishing a coercive from a normative order, is by no means recent. We have it in almost exactly the same words in a collection almost 175 years old.[49] It also appears in Ahmad Taymur's compendium recording usage in the early part of the twentieth century, with an explication identical to Burckhardt's and followed by another proverb with similar gram-

[47] Olivier Carré, *Mystique et politique: Lecture revolutionnaire du Coran* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1944), 47.

[48] See, for example, Wafa' al-Khanajri, *Al-Amthal al-Sha-'biyyah fi hayyatina al-yawmiyyah* (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Qawmiyyah Al-Hadithah, 1982), 10 (entry 26).

[49] John Lewis Burckhardt, *Arabic Proverbs: or the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians,* 3d ed. (1817, rpt. London: Curzon Press, 1972), 237 (entry 671). See also p. 275 (entry 761) for indications of other proverbs regarding Pharaoh as an embodiment of the state.

matical structure and similar meaning.[50] Historically the proverb has been taken to mean that one should accept that which is; to the extent that Qutb has enriched the meaning of the popular contrast between Pharoah and Moses (both of whom after all are products of Egypt), followers of Moses were now to see themselves on the offensive.[51]

For Qutb the partisans of Moses would still be aided in their struggle against Pharaoh by the breadth and depth of the classical Islamic heritage. Some ʿulama might be wrong in their interpretation of classical discourse, but their discourse would remain necessary for a new polity to be built. Qutb had claimed that a new approach to the sources of Islam and its interpretation were needed. His great life's work *Fi Zilal al-Qurʾan* was written in part with the desire to reclaim for intellectuals like himself a greater familiarity with the Islamic sciences and intellectual resources of the ʿulama. Qutb may have created a new approach to the relationship of man to God and a new approach to the governance of the community of the Muslims. What he did not develop was a theory of the kind of socialization necessary to pursue the new kind of governance or the relationship between past and present interpretations of the Law.

I now turn my attention to those who radically reject the old socialization required for interpretation and the entire canon of received interpretation. This radical rejection creates the possibility of imagining a new form of governance for the community and for bringing that new form into being: the creation of the sect. Before doing so, however, I wish to dispose briefly of the idea that we can explain the emergence of this break with classical Islamic doctrine merely by reference to the social background of those who join such groups.

SOCIAL ORIGINS AND PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

The arguments about the effect of social and economic changes creating the Islamist trend seem compelling in regard to the very recent past. Egypt has

[50] See Ahmad Taymur Basha, *Al-Amthal al-ʿammiyyah*, 4th ed. (Cairo: Al-Ahram Center for Translation and Publication, 1986). See numbers 371 and 372 (pp. 61–2). See also number 3080 (p. 512) with the explication again that the word pharaoh implies oppression and coercion, and counterposes Moses to Pharaoh, asserting the need for active opposition to those who assert that they are "the highest lord." The text of the proverb is the well-known "Ya, firʿawn, min farʿanak qal ma laqitsh hadd yiraddini" (Oh, Pharaoh, how did you become Pharaoh? No one opposed me).

[51] Although there is no doubt that Qutb's vision of secular authority as idolatrous grew during the Nasser years, it is quite possible that something of the populism of Nasserism has actually encouraged the opposition to the state by privileging popular and nonofficial feelings of resistance to that oppression, even if the state did not allow people to act on such feelings. Compare the treatment of the proverb "Oh Pharoah, how did you get to be Pharoah? No one opposed me" in Al-Khanajri, *Al-Amthal al-shaʿbiyyah* (p. 191, entry 1591) above (and in Taymur, *Al-Amthal alʿ-ammiyyah*, as cited above) and in Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Sina, *Falsafat al-mithl al-shaʿbi* (Cairo: Dar al-katib al-arabi, 1968), in which it is closely joined with a discussion on the need to resist tyranny (*al-tughyan*) and the proverb "Silence in the right is like eloquence in the wrong" (p. 61).

experienced inflation, stagnation, low productivity, crowding, and increased income inequity in the very recent period. Gilles Kepel and Eric Davis argue that the Islamist program arises from the declining economic situation of group members or (in Davis's words) "pressurization."[52] Such arguments link up neatly with Walzer's approach to Puritanism as a response to social and economic disorder, although they unfortunately do not explain the development of this ideology in the 1950s and 1960s, when the economic situation was improving for all Egyptians. It also cannot explain the militants' manifest and self-conscious understanding that their movement is the result of Nasserism's political victory rather than its economic failure.

We do have a fairly good idea of the Islamist groups' membership. What stands out for all the groups is the degree to which members and leaders alike were middle-class, well-educated in science and technology, upwardly mobile, and possessed of strong personalities. Salih Siriyya, founder of an Islamist group that attacked the Military Academy in 1972, had a Ph.D. in science education. Shukri Mustafa, leader of a group that kidnapped a leading ʿalim, had a Bachelor's degree in agricultural science.

The followers resembled the leaders. Although research on membership has been based on those arrested rather than random sampling, most scholars consider the results to be impressionistically representative of active members. Saad Eddin Ibrahim found twenty-nine of thirty-four members "were university graduates or university students who were enrolled at the time of their arrest." Seventeen of the eighteen students were in scientific programs, rather than programs in humanities or social studies; and most of those members who were employed seem to have also been heavily oriented to the hard sciences. The members were also decidedly middle-class in origin and prospects. As graduates of technical or professional schools, they either had or could look forward to professional employment. Only one member of the group was a worker. Only two of thirty-four had working-class fathers, and only another three had fathers who were small peasants. "With regard to fathers' occupation, about two-thirds (twenty-one out of thirty-four) were government employees, mostly in middle grades of the civil service." Even people who know very little about Egypt will realize how restricted this social group is in a country in which half the population is still rural.

Although many members appear to have been immigrants from small towns, they seem not to have carried much of the culture of deference from the small towns with them. They were not awed by political authority, nor do they seem to have had intense personal grievances traceable to their rural backgrounds for which the state was a convenient target. They mostly came from stable families and, as Ibrahim notes, are quite the opposite of the "alienated,

[52] See Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and Eric Davis, "Islamic Radicalism in Egypt," in *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, (S. Arjomand, ed. New York: Macmillan, 1984), 147.

marginal, anomic" individuals often presumed to be the basis for social movements such as theirs. It may be that the social groups from which these members were drawn were "pressurised" by the development of the Egyptian economy in the last decade as Davis and Kepel suggest, but there is little reason to believe that these individuals directly experienced such pressures.[53]

The economic picture that Davis and Kepel draw does not apply well to the late 1960s, when the Islamist groups first formed. The 1950s and 1960s saw significant economic progress and redistribution. Between 1951–52 and 1969–70, we know wages as a proportion of agricultural gross domestic product increased from 17 percent to 30 percent, although after 1970 they did drop back down to 25 percent.[54] The relative shares of the lowest 60 percent of households in overall consumption increased between 1958–59 and 1974–75. The relative income share of the top 10 percent, rather than the middle class, declined between the 1950s and 1976.[55]

Davis and Kepel have also misunderstood some aspects of internal migration. Immigrants to Cairo and Alexandria were more likely to see their share in the national income increase simply by moving because urban governorates had a disproportionately high share of income, wages, and consumption relative to population.[56] It is unlikely that many of the young people in these groups were adversely affected during the Nasser years; and to the extent that some were, it is more remarkable that their families bounced back under Sadat.[57] These young people were affected far more by the increasingly centralized authority of the state. Far from acceding to authority, these young people challenged it, although we cannot say whether they enjoyed challenging it. They were not raw bumpkins disoriented by the relatively greater freedom of the cities, for that freedom had drawn them to the cities—namely the "desire by the younger members of the rural community to break away from the rigid socio-cultural traditions prevailing in the village."[58] The young militants in the Islamist groups were more likely to have disliked both the authority structures of their rural homes and the prevailing norms of the urban

[53] There is certainly reason to believe that Davis is correct in his general proposition. Some survey research data indicates that children of clerical and sales workers were more likely to experience downward than upward mobility. See Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Social Mobility and Income Distribution," in *The Political Economy of Income Distribution in Egypt*, Gouda Abdel-Khalek and Robert Tignor, eds. (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 403. Those drawn into the movements do not seem to have been directly downwardly mobile. Davis, "Islamic Radicalism in Egypt," 147. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, 217.

[54] See Ibrahim Hassan al-Issawy, "Income Distribution and Economic Growth," in Tignor and Abdel-Khalek, *The Political Economy*, 90.

[55] *Ibid.*, 100–1.

[56] *Ibid.*, 119.

[57] See, for example, John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 274, for an account of the Zumr family, two members being arrested for participation in the assassination of Sadat.

[58] See Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, *Development, Income Distribution and Social Change in Rural Egypt (1952–1970)* [University of Cambridge Department of Applied Economics Occasional Paper 45] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 114.

elites. They became hostile to two distinct strands of contemporary Egyptian life: the enhanced power of the state and the monopoly of the ʿulama over assessing the moral dimensions of the state in terms of Islamic norms.

These young militants sought the freedom to engage in open religious discussion and in action. Middle-class youth are attracted to activism in self-denying groups. They have been drawn to what are essentially groups of equals in which discussion over questions of ethics and morals are fairly wide-ranging. The organizational structure and the membership of such groups are of a piece with an equal association of "saints." The self-abnegation, rectitude, and discipline of these groups, coupled with their moral certainty and self-assurance, seem favorably related to the demands on middle-class youth if they are to succeed. It therefore seems to me to make less sense to argue that these groups respond to social or economic "pressure" than that they responded—as did the early Protestant groups—to the process of political centralization that enhanced the arbitrary power of the political elite and especially the head of state. To make this argument, however, we must examine the actual concerns of the Sunni radicals as they themselves expressed them and pay attention to the institutional innovations they introduced into everyday life for members.

THE NEW PURITANS

The Puritans broke not only with a prevailing understanding of the relationship between man and God; they also broke with a previously accepted theory of the governance of the Christian community—the Church. In so doing the Puritans created not only a theory of calling but a theory of the socialization necessary to interpret Scripture. Protestants substituted ministers for priests not merely for ceremony: They presumed that "the most important knowledge of all, that which God imparts to his people, is . . . supremely and exclusively practical . . . [because] 'it affects the whole man with a hundred times more efficacy than the frigid exhortations of philosophers.' "[59] Contemporary Islamist groups have made a similar and equally significant break: They have received and developed a theory of jihad and taghut to address the relation of the human community to Revealed Law. They have also developed a theory of socialization and education that substitutes the practical experience of voluntary associations of lay intellectuals for the abstract ʿilm of religious professionals.

The groups with which I am primarily concerned are the so-called Jihad group, the Flight and Repentance group, and the Military Academy group.[60]

[59] William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin, A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 150.

[60] None of these groups call themselves by the names commonly used for them. The use of these common names is necessary, however, if this paper is to establish a dialogue with other scholars in the field. The so-called Flight and Repentance group referred to themselves as the *jamaʿat al-muslimin* (Community of Muslims); the so-called Military Academy group called themselves as the *munazzamat al-tahrir al-islami* (Islamic Liberation Organization).

The most important single source for my purposes is the text of *Al-Faridah al-Gha'ibah* (The Neglected Duty), an internal document of the Jihad group, whose members assassinated Anwar Sadat in 1981.[61] Western scholars widely agree that it is the most important single document presenting Egyptian Islamist positions and Egyptian intellectuals alike.[62] There are numerous commentaries on this work, including a fatwa or jurisprudential judgment issued by the highest institutional Islamic authority in Egypt, Shaykh al-Azhar, Jad al-Haqq Ali Jad al-Haqq.[63]

The "neglected duty" to which the pamphlet refers is jihad. The pamphlet was written to define jihad, an issue that consumed the internal discussions of the group. Of special interest was the relation of group members to nominal Muslims in political authority, such as Sadat, who called himself the "believing President." The pamphlet, written by ʿAbd al-Salam Faraj, paints a picture of Muslims in a world of idolatry and ignorance. Idolatry and ignorance are not spatially and temporally apart from modern Egypt but found even within nominally Muslim society. For Faraj, true Muslims cannot view Islam as orthopraxis: the performance of acts. Islam requires the believer to take a stand; and this stand, jihad, is the struggle for that enjoined by God. Not to struggle for that which is enjoined by God is to give allegiance to idols (taghut). To establish the validity of this nonreceived concept of jihad, Faraj must negate received interpretations of it and deny a privileged interpretive role to the ʿulama.

For Faraj, believers live in a situation of extreme tension. A distant and all-powerful God sends them down paths of salvation or error, acts alone, and cannot guarantee them salvation.[64] At the same time, the world constantly forces believers to accept the idols of state power as the source of law. Such "idols of this world can only be made to disappear through the power of the sword."[65] Contemporary idolatry is revealed primarily by the intrusive structure of the state, which enforces the law of unbelief.[66] Rulers of the state are members of the nominal community of Muslims. They have Muslim names, pray, fast, and claim to be Muslims, but they are actually apostates.[67]

[61] This particular work is so important that it has been translated into English.

[62] See the translation and commentary by Johannes J. G. Jansen, in *The Neglected Duty* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), xvii–xviii, and Jamal al-Banna, *Al-Faridah al-Gha'ibah: jihad al-sayf am jihad al-aql?* (Cairo: Dar Thabit, 1983), 5.

[63] See *Al-Fatawa al-Islamiyyah* [hereafter *FI*] (Cairo: Dar al-Ifta' al-misriyyah, 1983), vol. 10, no. 29, 3726–92, for the fatwa and an Arabic text of the booklet itself. See also Muhammad ʿAmarah, *Al-Faridah al-Gha'ibah: ʿard wa-hiwar wa-taqyim* (Cairo: Dar thabit, 1982).

[64] See Jansen, *The Neglected Duty,* 160, 162: "If God sends someone on the right path, no one can send him astray. If God sends someone astray, no one can guide him." See also p. 223 (§130, 131). In *FI,* see pp. 3762 and 3789–90. This is, of course, the "double decree" whose absence Weber found in conflict with a developed Protestant ethic. All translations are from Jansen. Citations will be to both Jansen and *FI* to allow general readers, as well as those who read Arabic, to pursue the argument.

[65] Jansen, *The Neglected Duty,* 161 (§4); *FI,* p. 3762. The word for idols here is taghut.

[66] Jansen, *The Neglected Duty,* 167 (§21); *FI,* p. 38.5.

[67] Jansen, *The Neglected Duty,* 169 (§25); *FI,* p. 38.5. Compare Calvin's *Institutes,* II,xv,i:

The God evoked here is quite similar to the God in whom Weber argued the Protestants believed. The logic of Faraj's argument is that believers must ceaselessly strive in the path of God to be considered true Muslims. In this regard, Faraj has made a critical break with all the received understandings of Islam. Jad al-Haqq (representing the ʿulama), and social critics, such as Jamal al-Banna and Muhammad ʿAmara, all agree that Muslims are those who recite the shahadah or statement of belief in the unity of God and the prophecy of Muhammad. All three critics of Faraj agree that the recitation of the shahadah is sufficient to place one within the community of Muslims, regardless of other sins of omission or commission. The only acceptable way to place someone who has recited the shahadah outside the visible community of Muslims would be if that same person expressly recanted. Insofar as Islam is a religion of orthopraxy, as suggested in the earlier discussion of Al-Banna, it is impermissible to distinguish between segments of the visible community.[68]

The core of the pamphlet is an argument about jihad in the so-called *ayat al-sayf* (Verse of the Sword) in the Qur'an: Is it historically specific to the situation of the Prophet at a particular moment of his mission, or does it have wider implications?[69] The Islamists argue for a broader interpretation—a need to continue to struggle until God is recognized as supreme throughout human history. The argument becomes somewhat technical, but the intent of the author is plain. Faraj wants to use the Verse of the Sword to argue that those who nominally accept Islam but become renegades commit a greater sin than those who never accept Islam at all. When linked to the rejection of Islam as orthopraxy, any nominal members of the community of Muslims are liable to be renegades in the eyes of the Islamists. The details in which the argument is couched thus do not detract from its basic nature: Those nominal Muslims who manifestly betray the community by the standards of the religious virtuosi commit the most heinous ethical and moral delinquency imaginable.[70]

The political rulers of Egypt are apostates because they do not rule in accord with revelation. They impose some, but not all, of the Islamic laws. More remarkable is the way the argument is made: It contrasts politics as an inherently arbitrary activity with the divine rules that should be used to administer a well-ordered society. Contemporary rulers are like the Mongols, whose

"Thus the Papists in the Present age, although the name of the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world, be frequently in their mouths, yet since they are contented with the mere name, and despoil him of his power and dignity [Christ] is not their foundation" (p. 540).

[68] For support for such a position from the Qur'an, see III,87 and LXIV,2. The sticky issue of intentionality intrudes here and what led the ʿulama to orthopraxis is an important and subtle argument. I hope to deal with issues of community and intentionality in the classical Islamic tradition in other works.

[69] For a lucid presentation of the arguments here, see Peters, *Islam and Colonialism,* 128–9, especially whether the question of the verse to "slay the unbelievers" should be interpreted in the context of earlier verses regarding treaty-breaking. *Ayat al-sayf* is IX,5 in the Qur'an.

[70] That apostasy is the only unforgiveable sin is agreed by everyone writing in this controversy. The question is over what constitutes apostasy: Does it need to be an express and intended repudiation of Islam, or not.

king, Genghis Khan, ruled by means of an arbitrary and self-interested decrees (*siyasat*—the word which in contemporary Arabic means policies or politics): "It contains many legal rulings which he simply made up himself because he liked them."[71] Evil resides in the arbitrariness as much as in the substance of the state, and the state in Faraj's sights is the nationalist, postcolonial state, not Western liberalism.

Jad al-Haqq presents the ʿulama's criticism of Faraj, but there is another current critical of his work sustained primarily by intellectuals long associated with the older Islamic movements. Jamal al-Banna, brother of Hasan al-Banna, has been a Muslim activist in the trade union movement for almost forty years. He has written extensively on an Islamic approach to trade union and labor problems. Muhammad ʿAmara has fought strenuously to renew a lay tradition of Islamic political argument for over two decades and in the process has contributed significantly to Egyptian political and intellectual dialogue. Writers such as al-Banna and ʿAmara abhor the idea that the entire postcolonial process of state building must be rejected as idolatrous and error-ridden. Such a blanket condemnation is presented as impermissibly naive by those who attack the Jihad group from within the Islamist movement. For them politics remains the art of the possible within an anticolonial framework:

> In any case, we must distinguish between rulers who furthered colonialism in our country and between those who headed toward national independence *in a secular framework or did not apply the shar*ʿ *of God totally* [bold face in original]; struggle against the former is immediate and direct . . . but with the latter insofar as they move toward independence they bring closer the day when Islam and its state return to the countries of the Muslims.[72]

Such critics hold to an incrementalist Islamist strategy and view the Nasser period as positive. Human frailty for these authors enhances the attractiveness of gradual and incremental politics.

The knowledge of human frailty and a sense of predestination need not inspire withdrawal; it can inspire absolute certainty in the effort to master the world. Such a vision can be profoundly antihumanist. Just how much it opposes contemporary Islamic humanism can be seen in the response by Jamal al-Banna to the doctrines of *Al-Faridah al-Ghaʾibah*. Al-Banna asserts that justice is the distinguishing feature of Islam as a monotheist religion, even as love (*mahabbah*) and the singleness of God (*tawhid*) are the distinguishing features of Christianity and Judaism respectively.[73]

At this point there appears to be an obvious and important distinction between Calvinism and Sunni fundamentalism. Islamists can identify the

[71] Jansen, *The Neglected Duty*, 168 (§22); *FI*, p. 3865. See, Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, 195–6. Compare Zwingli's "A Christian Town is the Same as a Christian Congregation," in Lochner, *Huldrych Zwingli's Concept of History*, 228–9.

[72] ʿAmarah, *Al-Faridah al-Ghaʾibah*, 47.

[73] See Jamal al-Banna, *Al-Faridah al-Ghaʾibha*, 122, regarding justice (*ʿadl*) and an exposition of the need for free discussion of religion.

source of idolatry occurring in human activity. The West is that source, and colonial history gives weight to their claims.[74] Unfortunately, this may be a distinction without much of a difference. Calvin himself believed the Turkish conquests of Europe in his day had brought "filthiness and defilement."[75] Early Protestantism and Sunni radicalism have significant affinities not only in conceptualizing sin in terms of tyranny but in exemplifying arbitrary tyranny in the ruling institutions of other cultures. It would be a mistake to assume that the denunciations of the West rest on any great familiarity with Western society and culture.[76] As analysts, we might do better to conceptualize Sunni antagonism to the West as a metaphor for antagonism to the "world," the human condition in which believers are tempted and tested every day, and duped by error and idolatry. The West is not only a source but a symbol for the place in which idolatry has reached its logical extreme and established its kingdom.

We should recall that early Protestants often projected what they thought to be most evil to the little-known countries of the East. Protestant poets could even conflate the symbols of Catholicism and Islam to draw a generalized picture of tyranny. In Protestant imagery it was Spenser's very "Oriental" Pope (and Milton's Satan) who appears as beguiling tyranny:

> A goodly lady clad in scarlet red,
> Purfled with gold and pearle of rich assay,
> And like a Persian mitre on her hed
> She wore, with crowns and owches garnished,
> The which her lauish louers to her gave;
> Her wanton palfrey all was ouerspred.[77]

The conflation of tyranny and idolatry in the work of Sayyid Qutb and in *Al-Faridah al-gha'ibah* reminds us of John Calvin's own understanding of tyranny: the ruler who has no self-restraint.[78]

Such arguments make little sense to Jad al-Haqq or a humanist layman such as ʿAmara. In ʿAmara's words, to say that the ruler of Egypt is an apostate

[74] This is a staple of writing on Islamist movements. One of the most eloquent examples would be the chapter, "The Question of Authenticity and Collaboration," in Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), but also see R. H. Dekmejian, "The Anatomy of Islamic Revival," in *Middle East Journal,* 34:1 (Winter 1980), 1–12. An early and still useful approach is Wilfred Cantwell Smith's chapter "Islam in Recent History" in *Islam in Modern History.*

[75] Bouwsma, *John Calvin,* 64.

[76] This is fairly well recognized among Arab researchers of the phenomenon and Muslim official figures. See *Nadwat al-sahwah al-islamiyyah wa humum al-watan al-ʿarabi,* in *Al-Watan* (April 15, 1987).

[77] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene,* I,ii,13. See also John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* I, 330–350, in which Satan is perceived by the fallen angels as "thir great Sultan" and II,1–10, for the description of the Satanic "Throne of Royal State, which far/Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind. . . ."

[78] As Hopfl puts it in *The Christian Polity,* for Calvin "the absence of restraint seems to have been of the essence of tyrannical rule for him" (p. 16).

"contradicts reality: for prayers are being said, and mosques are open and being built, and there are alms that Muslims give, and they go on pilgrimmages, and the verdicts of Islam are effective in the state except in certain areas such as the *hudud* punishments and *riba* and other concerns that are the object of positive legislation."[79]

Beside the authority of the state lies the authority of interpretation. Both ʿAmara and Jad al-Haqq point out the ludicrous and acontextual readings the pamphlet makes of Ibn Taymiyyah and the Qur'an respectively. Jad al-Haqq parses the syntax of the Qur'an verses regarding "those who refuse to rule by what God has sent down" to show it does not conform with Faraj's reading. ʿAmara draws on fourteenth-century history to show that Islamist militants not only take words out of context but willfully misread them.

By insisting on their interpretations of the Qur'an in direct contradiction to received meanings, however, the Sunni militants openly defy the control of a small elite over these texts. As long as discussions about what the Qur'an means remain technical, rulers have little need to worry about Islamic critiques of political actors finding wide audiences. To the degree that the Islamist militants have found a language that is evocative in such everyday terms as proverbs and that remains rooted in a sophisticated ethical critique of state power, they become a danger. Only from the perspective of a fundamental critique of state power and coercion does it make sense to say that Egypt is today governed worse than the East under the Mongols. As ʿAmara points out, it otherwise makes no sense at all.

From this perspective Mongol law means improvised decisions by human beings, and that implies, for Faraj, rulers who cannot restrain themselves and must therefore be restrained. From this rationale the young fundamentalists draw revolutionary and almost Maoist implications: There is no need to fight the distant enemy (such as Israel) until the near one is vanquished. For older Islamic activists, such as ʿAmara, this reasoning resembles that of the Communists who argue that class struggle supersedes national struggle.[80] For ʿAmara the danger of such reasoning lies in its implicit approval of the politics of the putsch: It was precisely such thinking, he points out, that impelled the Free Officers to take power after the 1948 Palestine War.

Faraj and the ideas he presented to the Jihad group must be seen in the context of a much broader movement. The Jihad group not only had to develop its own ideas but also to defend them in competition with other groups for a larger audience of interested listeners and potential adherents. Faraj therefore differentiates his approach for establishing the *hukm allah* (rule of God) from other strategies: mysticism, partisan politics, "burrowing from within," or withdrawal into closed communities. The pamphlet clarifies to

[79] *FI*, p. 3743; ʿAmarah, *Al-Faridah al-Ghaʾibah*, 48–50, and especially the comparison of the Mamluks governing Egypt, as described by Ibn Taymiyyah to whose juridical rulings the members of the Jihad group referred in comparison to contemporary Egypt.

[80] ʿAmarah, *Al-Faridah al-Ghaʾibah*, 46.

some degree the existence of a growing movement in which these ideas are routinely debated.[81]

The final section of the pamphlet concerns intragroup relations. Almost the entire conclusion deals with issues of intention, motivation, and compliance. Jihad is not presented merely as another form of works but as a higher instance of faith, for the actions of jihad will yield a nullity without "complete devotion . . . forgetting the outward appearance of things created by looking uninterruptedly towards the Creator."[82] How would one know what is in people's hearts, however? How can one be sure that people—even in groups like Jihad—are not saying one thing but thinking another? The only way to come close is through unrelenting examination of motives and behavior accomplished in small groups in which everything can be scrutinized. It is not surprising that the pamphlet ends by calling on those who are *not* up to the task of *jihad fi sabil allah* (struggle in the path of God) to "declare outright their true motive."[83] Blind obedience is not enough. Such obedience in this instance would be less than total and would reveal unreliable human emotions: friendship or familial ties that would be more harmful than outright enmity.[84] Members of the group must cut themselves off from their pasts and refuse to tolerate the regrowth of other loyalties within the group.

In this regard the Jihad group recapitulates internally what it has already proclaimed externally: the existence of a constant danger that human emotions and the condition of man lead to a loss of commitment to God. The only way to guard against this likelihood is to limit radically membership in the sect and guard at every moment against leakage from the world at large. Coupled with the incipient definition of the need for members to express, or one might say confess, constantly, the small group creates a new atmosphere of heightened individual dedication that is not mystical at all. Here we can see the creation of a new cultural norm at odds with received Islamic thought, although well-known within Christianity: the use of confession to bind followers to an institution. We shall return to this later.

The Jihad group is not the only fundamentalist group. We also have some sense of the ideas of at least one of the others, the so-called *Al-Takfir wa al-hijrah* group, which generally prefers to call itself the Association of Muslims (*Jamaʿat al-Muslimin*). This group was responsible for the kidnapping and murder of the former minister of Religious Endowments, Shaykh Dhahabi, in 1977. Although different in nuance, much of what the Flight and Repentance group believed was similar to Jihad. The five main points around which Flight and Repentance formed were:

[81] Jansen, *The Neglected Duty*, 8–15.

[82] *Ibid.*, 222 (§130); *FI*, p. 3789.

[83] Jansen, *The Neglected Duty*, 225 (§134); *FI*, p. 3791: "*wa yadʿuhum ila al-ifsah ʿamma sataruhu.*"

[84] Jansen, *The Neglected Duty*, 228 (§138); *FI*, 3792.

(1) all existing societies are in a state of ignorance and apostasy;
(2) all decisions by ijmaʿ must be rejected, including the "idols" of "*qiyas*" or analogical reasoning;
(3) only members of the jamaʿ at *al-muslimin* are good Muslims because all others submit [*aslamu*] to taghut, governance by other than what God sent down, and they consider as Muslims all those who recite the shahadah;
(4) Islam is not merely a recitation of the shahadah but determination [*iqrar*] and action [*ʿamal*];
(5) only the Prophet and his companions are to be accepted as a true group or congregation, and all other congregations established so far must be rejected.[85]

The radical rejection of all previous interpretations in Islam and of the socialization required to enter into the interpretative discussion with the ʿulama is pronounced. We can see another form of this rejection of the authority of the ʿulama in the precis of Shukri's declarations before a Military Court of State Security November 6–8:

The interpretive works of the four imams, Shukri argued, were unnecessary. The Koran was delivered in Arabic; it is therefore clear, and the only tool that may be needed for explaining the meaning of some of its terms is a good dictionary. In what way do the glosses of the imams make its meanings more accessible? And why do the glosses of the imams themselves not need to be glossed? . . . After thus appealing to the common sense of his interlocutors, Shukri told them why the imams have closed the door of ijtihad: so that they had indeed become idols (*asnam*) worshipped like the deities of a pagan pantheon.[86]

As a technical legal issue, ijtihad has to do with whether the ʿulama are seen as giving independent and original decisions of principle or following existing ones. In terms of power the issue of ijtihad has to do, as Shukri realized, with the kind of education needed to make valid judgments on Islamic law: Does one need an elite socialization or does one simply need to be able to take out a dictionary?

The truly radical nature of Shukri's rejection of the visible community of Muslims since the fourth century *hijri* led him to a position regarding the goals of the Islamist movement somewhat different from that of the Jihad group. The distinction between the Jihad group and Shukri's group may not be obvious and might even seem minor.

Jihad members tend, as do the Muslim Brothers and other activists, to identify the goal of the Islamic movement as the institution of real Islamic law, *al-hukm bi-ma anzala allah*. The Jihad group rejected the notion that the president of Egypt was really a Muslim, despite his nominal membership in the visible community, and seems to have implicitly assumed that other nominal Muslims could be brought (if not to salvation) at least to compliance with

[85] See ʿAbd al-Rahman Abu al-Khayr, *Dhikrayati maʿ-a "Jamaʿ-at al-Muslimin"* (*Al-Takfir wa al-hijrah*) (Kuwait: Dar al-Buhuth al-ʿilmiyyah, 1980), 9–10. This is essentially a statement of Shukri's at a court proceeding published in the press on October 21, 1977. The word for idols in paragraph 2 is asnam.

[86] Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, 79.

appropriate norms of behavior by a state led by a member of the invisible community. Shukri's group distinguished themselves from the Brotherhood (and presumably other Islamist groups) by their insistence that their program envisaged a prior stage: getting nominal Muslims to accept Islam as their real religion (*idkhal al-nas fi din allah*). Islamist groups, like Protestants, disagree with each other as much as they disagree with the tradition from which they come.

Shukri's group was far more intensely directed toward its leader and closed than any other group. In prison the group members refused any contact with members of other groups or with former members of their own group; even the Communists were more acceptable to them than other Islamists.[87] The nature of attachment to the group was varied. Shukri, of course, was an extraordinarily powerful, perhaps even charismatic, personality. The focus of loyalty for group members nevertheless appears to have remained the group rather than Shukri and remained so even as members disagreed with Shukri. Abu al-Khayr, in his memoirs of the group, affirms a rejection of ijmaʿ and passive membership in the Muslim community, freely admits his dislike for the kidnapping and subsequent murder of the former Minister of Religious Endowments, and does not seem completely at ease with the idea that all Islamic history from the death of the Prophet to Shukri is one of apostasy.

SUMMARY

Islamist groups appear to share a common core of beliefs despite their disputes. This common core of beliefs allows militants to move within the framework of a larger dialogue that clearly is more than the mere search for the latest and most fashionable guru.[88] When one looks especially at the Jihad group and the Jamaʿat al-Muslimin, several aspects of their beliefs appear to be shared in common among themselves and with early Protestantism:

(1) Belief in a single and implacable being who chooses our destiny after life (the "double decree,") and belief that as a consequence men and women must persevere actively in the way of God intellectually because we can have no knowledge or assurance of salvation.
(2) Belief in a principle of order that, by the nature of human existence, subverts our faith in God and converts our faith into idolatry.
(3) Rejection of the socialization and education that form into an elite those who would interpret Scripture.
(4) Rejection of all or almost all received commentary on Scripture and a preference for reading Scripture directly.

From this common ground with Puritanism flow two important features of the lives of the members of these groups: First, they exist in a state of war with society; and second, they adopt congregational innovations that strengthen the

[87] ʿAbd al-Rahman Abu al-Khayr, *Dhikrayati*, pp. 137–9.
[88] Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, 204.

cohesion of their small group, even if such innovations fall outside the realm of normal Islamic practice.

Members of these groups conceive of themselves as the only real Muslims living in what is essentially an apostate society. War becomes a duty for every one of them, not just a duty for some against an external enemy. Abu al-Khayr twice alludes to his own belief that groups like "TH" and others were at war with society, although he would have preferred a long period of struggle within society (*idkhal al-nas fi din allah*) to a sharp confrontation with the state, because he "saw that the group [TH] was in need of long years of peace during which it could manage its struggle [jihad, in the original] of a type that I like to think of as 'struggle with social appearances.' "[89] When Salih Siriyya was executed, Abu al-Khayr's feelings of social and ideological warfare intensified:

> Silence overtook me with the inner secret feeling in the depths of my being, that of incessant war against Islam. For Salih Siriyya and his group met the same fate as the Muslim Brotherhood which had been beaten down because they dared to make the victory of Islam on the earth their aim. . . ."[90]

Shukri's testimony during his trial certainly attests also to his sense of being at war with state and society. He even refused to allow his followers to pray in state-supported mosques.[91]

The belief that Muslims inside the Muslim community are at war with their own society is a significant break with the received Muslim thinking on jihad. The conclusions the Islamists draw for constructing the institutions of their own congregational and communal life are equally at odds with the received doctrine about how Muslims ought to deal with each other. The perception of social war provides the context for the major institutional innovation of these sectarian congregations: They spy on and constrain the behavior of each other. The militants are engaged in constant oversight of each other and constant reporting on each other; they are also engaged in constant discussion of their own behavior and that of others. This is a striking feature of their normal activity and one which clearly makes an impact on more popular circles.

The Friday religion page in the daily newspaper *Al-Ahram* provides some insight into how innovative this sectarian behavior is. Islam has traditionally opposed the idea of "spying out" or *tajassus*. What then, one reader writes, is the verdict of religion on overseeing one's comrades at work? Although it is acceptable to oversee one's comrades in the sense of supervision, "snitching" is frowned on. Even worse would be the routine and public discussion of one's own shortcomings and those of others; yet this is precisely the activity so highly regarded by saints and virtuosi. Whether the name is public confession or criticism and self-criticism, the activity is quite familiar.

[89] 'Abd al-Rahman Abu al-Khayr, *Dhikrayat*, 78.
[90] *Ibid.*, 98.
[91] Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, 80–82.

The young people in both the Jihad group and in the TH group were especially concerned with the problems of what it meant to "bare one's heart." Yet this concern was something the ʿulama found contradictory to received Islam because it would turn the religion into one of "spying out." Most of the young people in these groups found society to be wholly corrupt and thus were inclined to flee from it, whether by retreating to living in the circle of the group within urban society or by leaving urban society altogether for the oases. Muhammad ʿAbd al-Nur, dean of the Women's College at Al-Azhar University, ridiculed the idea of revolt against state authority. Relying on classical compilations and consensus, ʿAbd al-Nur said that "the original sources such as Al-Bukhari and Muslim make clear what the relationship [between ruler and ruled] is and in these sources we find agreement that it is not permissible to combat the ruler nor to attack him when that would lead to widespread anarchy [*ihdath al-fitan*] or bloodshed [*safk al-dima'*] or splitting the community [*tamziq shaml al-umma*]." Even if the members of the Islamic community do not like a ruler's policies, he must be patiently borne as long as he does not commit an act of outright apostasy. "Rebellion," he said "against the ruler and strife with him are forbidden [*haram*] by the received consensus [*ijmaʿ*] of Muslims."[92]

ʿAbd al-Nur also suggests that ordinary Muslims cannot clearly evaluate state policies in the light of religious injunctions. Judgments about the character of a ruler as a good Muslim are also to be avoided. Thus, ʿAbd al-Nur suggests we must be careful about judging anyone, because judgment is reserved to God. Perhaps someone ought to look at the relation of policies to religion and hold officials accountable, but it is not a task to be left to the uninitiated and certainly not one to be decided by civil strife.

CONCLUSION

The sixteenth century is not the twentieth century, and Islam is not Christianity. That much is obvious. If mere statements that times or doctrines differed were sufficient to have any real meaning, then most of the literature surveyed at the beginning of this essay would not have been written, nor would there be a discipline of comparative politics. What is most striking about many post-Lutheran Protestant views of the state and those of the contemporary Egyptian Islamists studied here, is how similar they are in their distrust of a state in which policies directly reflect the personal preferences of rulers. The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat was not dynastic nor wholly absolute, but state policies grew out of their personal preferences to a greater degree than is true in the states of the advanced industrial economies. *L'état,* to paraphrase Louis XIV, *était presqu'eux.*

We look at polities today as if the categories of corporatism, pluralism, and

[92] "Uslub al-taʿamul bayna al-hakim wa al-mahkum" (Modes of Interaction between Ruler and Ruled), *Al-Ahram,* November 5, 1982.

authoritarianism exhausted the conceptual framework available for analysis. These categories suggest less variety in politics than citizens experience. Absolutism was not a lasting form of the European state, but it may be helpful in understanding contemporary state building in the third world. It certainly allows us to escape from the pluralist-corporatist dichotomy.

Absolutism and Puritanism were competing strategies for building powerful postagrarian states. The dominant theme in absolutist state building was the monarch's enhanced persona at the administrative center, but the dominant theme in Puritanism was society's enhanced compliance through service to a just political order. Puritan communities and absolutist rulers form a stable antagonism. If Puritan communities remain indigestible during the period of absolutist state building, then some form of liberal and plural regime may emerge, as in England. If Puritan communities become integrated into the machinery of government, then an effective and pervasive authoritarian state is built. Fundamentalism (whether Calvinist or Islamist) represents a challenge to absolutist regimes. Puritanism can be the basis for resistance to one kind of state and for dogged acquiescence in another.

The doctrinal and ideological arguments about Calvinism and capitalism emerge in comparative perspective as less important than Calvinism and the ideology of governance—whether governance of the individual, the society, or of any particular institution. Walzer and Wolin seem on firmer ground than other analysts of the Puritan experience when they argue that it was primarily an argument about politics and the state. The state in my argument, unlike theirs however, appears to be getting stronger not weaker. The question that then logically arises is why should either Calvinism or Sunni fundamentalism emerge as an ideology of governance? What is the reason for talking about power and governance in terms of predestination, calling the socialization required for interpretation, jihad, taghut, or ijmaʿ?

The central question of fundamentalism is how men and women live together: whether they can cooperate freely or whether they must be coerced into cooperation. In Calvin's words, civil polity is required for human existence and "to entertain a thought of its extermination is inhuman barbarism; it is as necessary to mankind as bread and water, light and air, and far more excellent."[93] The need for a civil polity that provides secure property, guards against fraud, and ensures modesty and religion, arises in Calvin's analysis because men are wicked and egoistic and because fallen men (and women) cannot triumph on their own over their own instincts. Civil society's excellence, however, arises not from wickedness and egoism but as an act of divine grace: "The authority possessed by kings and other governors over all things upon earth is not a consequence of the perverseness of men, but of the providence and holy ordinance of God, who has been pleased to regulate

[93] *Institutes*, 772 (iv,xx).

human affairs in this manner; forasmuch as he is present, and also presides among them, in making laws and in executing equitable judgments."[94]

Calvin was aware that kings might act cruelly and indeed considered the likelihood of monarchy degenerating into tyranny to be great. His argument is, however, that the Christian community (however sinful its members might be in a theological sense) can thus only form a viable society by submitting to the rule of God. If everyone acted in accord with the manifest rules of God, then presumably coercion—and especially the likelihood of arbitrary self-interested coercion—would decline.

The arguments about divinely established norms are not only about salvation but also about the formation of cooperative human societies in which members police themselves and each other. Creating such a society was not an aim of Protestant thinkers, but they did consider the existence of such societies a valuable background condition for the pilgrimmage of the soul on earth. For contemporary Muslims (and indeed perhaps for the Islamic tradition as a whole), it may be that the creation of such a rule-governed society in accord with the laws of God is a more desirable end than in sixteenth-century Europe.

Calvin himself, like most sixteenth-century divines, was unwilling to recognize a right of generalized rebellion. Calvinist theory, which did develop with Pierre Viret and Theodore Beza, promptly moved in the direction of opposing not only churchly authority but civil authority as well.[95] Its development did not include any squeamishness with regard to the use of violence of the kind we would call terrorism. As Walzer notes, Calvinists such as John Knox rapidly developed a theory of civil office in which "[m]agistrates and noblemen had no rights beyond the performance of their godly duty and no rights at all short of that."[96] Mary, Queen of Scots, "that Jesabel" to John Knox, ought to have been punished with death; and Walzer is probably correct that Knox would have been quite content had an individual accomplished the punishment.[97] That Islamist movements resort to violence against individual rulers does not necessarily differentiate them from early Protestants.

Is it possible to employ an argument about Sunni radicalism similar to that just developed for Protestantism? For example, is Sunni radicalism an argument about the state, rather than merely a response to a particular set of social conditions? Most attempts to explain Sunni radicalism begin with the particular nature of contemporary Egypt: its confusion, poverty, crowding, and the failure of Nasserism.[98] Many of Egypt's current problems no doubt stem from

[94] *Institutes*, 774 (iv,xx).

[95] Eire, *War Against the Idols*, 294–8.

[96] Walzer, *Revolution of the Saints*, 105.

[97] *Ibid.*, 108–9.

[98] Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, 234–5; Michael M. J. Fischer, "Islam and the Revolt of the Petty Bourgeoisie," *Daedalus*, 111:1 (1982), 112–3; Abd al-Moneim Said Aly and Man-

the failures of Nasserism. It still seems plausible to suggest that not a few also arise from Nasser's successes in transforming the state and society. The recruits to Islamist movements not only confront the vastly enhanced power of the colonial state, but they are themselves result of the social change and educational opportunities Nasser created.

Attraction to Puritanical doctrines, however, seems to occur not among those who are downwardly mobile but the reverse—it occurs among those who will find the concerted and methodical use of their talents rewarded. It may well be that immersion in the Islamist movement in general helps people to succeed rather than excuse their failures to themselves.

One of the very few "micro-studies" of nonarrested members of Islamist movements involves women. There are certainly economic benefits to joining groups, but these may be side effects rather than causes of their existence. Young women have been attracted to Islamist movements and veiling for a variety of reasons, including the economic habits of dress they inspire. The willingness to forego being fashionable by keeping up with imported designs may stem from strengthened identities in a variety of areas.[99]

Certainly Egypt and most of the Islamic countries today are in situations reminiscent of the period of change to territorial state building and economic consolidation from an older order that was ideologically universalist but institutionally localist and cosmopolitan. Puritanism everywhere aided in the transition to state-defined societies, and it is easy to see in contemporary Islamic activism the same kind of commitment to activities that would strengthen the state, should a leader actually allied to or at least sympathetic to Islamist currents appear.[100] The contemporary Islamist movement will grow in part due to the way it inculcates methodical discipline in its adherents and any consequent prosperity they experience, but such prosperity remains an effect, not a cause. Religion continues to exist; and Islam, like Christianity, will not go away but will remain the preeminent factor in "ethics and ritual . . . [n]either capitalism, nationalism, nor later forces such as socialism have effective means of linking the family, its life cycle, and death to the macrosocial forces they embody."[101] Perhaps today, as well, we appreciate the role that the family and its life cycle play, for life and death are among the few experiences universally shared: We are all born, and we all die.

An explanation of Puritanism as merely a response to the interests of particular groups tends rapidly to functionalism. Those whose "interests" are met by being Puritans become Puritans because otherwise those interests

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fred Wenner, "Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt," *Middle East Journal,* 36:3 (Summer 1982), 347–8.

[99] Valerie Hoffman-Ladd, "Polemics on the Modesty and Segregation of Women," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 19:1, 23–50, 44.

[100] Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power,* 470–1.

[101] *Ibid.,* 472.

would never be met.[102] A historical explanation of the success of those who happen to accept such doctrines, as given by Walzer for Puritanism and Davis for Islamism, makes more sense; but, as I hope I have shown, we need to bring the state rather than the capitalist market into the explanatory picture. A fully historical analogical explanation is, however, not completely sufficient, though it might be satisfying to separate "us" from "them." Such an explanation makes Puritanism only an atavistic ideology of transition through whose doors all cultures and civilizations pass, once and in only one direction.

The most compelling conclusions from comparing Sunni fundamentalists has to do with the rescue of the term fundamentalist and a deeper understanding of its meaning. If the argument presented here is valid and if Sunni radicalism and Protestantism are two variants of a single transformation of a prior classical religious tradition, then that transformation has more to do with state building than with capitalism. Protestantism has been presented either as the midwife of capitalism or of modern politics. It might be more fruitfully conceptualized as the unintended progenitor of the modern state. Thus there may still be room to re-think the Protestant ethic in terms of its role in the process of building states that have pushed the competing powers of religion and community to the side.

The importance of thinking about fundamentalism as a movement that presents a powerful critique of arbitrary absolutist power and one which presents a model for church and lay government that draws more than any predecessors on the voluntary compliance of members should not blind us to the negative nature of fundamentalism. If a single ruler can be arbitrary as he presides over the transition of a pluralistic (and to use Weber's word, polytheist) society from an agricultural to an industrial base, then contemporary democracy may also appear arbitrary, pluralistic, and polytheist.

[102] For a good critique of functionalist explanations, from which this section is drawn, see Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 27–29.