

FAWZIYYA & GAMAL EL-BANNA FOUNDATION FOR ISLAMIC CULTURE AND INFORMATION

Our faith

Call for Islamic Revival

The Islamic Renaissance Fellowship (2007)

OUR FAITH

(1)

There is no fear that the Muslim person will be dissolved in contemporary civilization because he is deeply connected to God and the Prophet with certain values which curb his whims and prevent him from slipping away.

Belief in an all powerful God is instilled in the spirit by the image of Almighty God that is present in the Qur'an. As for what is said in books of theology, it does not enrich, in fact it may harm

(2)

The prophets are the true leaders of humanity and they must be made the ideals of leadership. Dictators, army generals, emperors and kings, etc., must be disposed of as must be the polices of oppression that these dictators have founded which have polluted the idea of rule and leadership and humanity

We believe that Islam has presented the exemplary image of God and Prophet, in the meantime we understand the forms which have been presented by other religions because religions have the same essence, but the forms are multiple. We believe in all the prophets and we believe that Almighty God wanted plurality and variety ("If your Lord has so desired, He would have made people one nation". Qur'an: V, 48.) and that judgement on his plurality is for God on the Day of Judgement.

We believe that religion is the strongest characteristic of Arab society and that it represents history, civilization and conscience. Ignoring it cuts off the line of continuity with the people. This fact does not negate that philosophy, literature and art have taken the place of religion in European society. Each society has its own destiny, nature and character which cannot be overcome or ignored. But at the same time, a society must not avoid mixing of ideas and dialogue between civilizations and similarities between religions, because wisdom is the longpursued common goal of believers.

(3)

We believe in the dignity of man and that God bestowed this on all descendants of Adam. No power can deprive them of this dignity for it covers all of Humanity -men and women, black and white, rich and poor, etc. The Qur'an shows a symbol of this dignity when the angels bowed down to Adam and the force of nature was placed at his disposal

Human dignity must be at the root of all social, economic and political policies and anything which threatens human dignity, whether in body or in soul, must be completely forbidden

Since Islam has exceeded in number and kind, the international agreements of human rights, the least that should be done is the immediate implementation of these agreements

(4)

Since the Qur'an gave the reason for the angels bowing down to Adam as his ownership of the knowledge which distinguishes him from other creatures and which saves him from superstition, the knowledge must be the main aim of Muslims. Every Islamic regime must spread culture and knowledge, open the way for them and prepare all the means which facilitate contemporary knowledge and skills to the masses. We cannot enter the 21st century with basic illiteracy

(5)

We believe in freedom of thought. It is the basis for all advancement. Nothing must stand in its way. The response to ideas that contradict the articles of faith must be through words, not through confrontation, terrorism or takfir (declaring someone a non-believer). There is no contradiction between complete freedom of thought and religion because religion is built on belief

There is no belief without conviction. This can only exist in an environment which allows liberal examination and pious scrutiny. The Holy Qur'an has nearly one hundred verses which lay down absolute freedom of faith and says that the decision is to be made by each individual ("There is no compulsion in religion". Qur'an: II, 256).

There is no freedom without the freedom to print and publish, to form political parties, organizations, trade unions and the rest of civil society's organizations. There is no freedom without these associations being free to pursue their goals, as long as this takes place through peaceful means. We completely reject the calls for takfir and apostasy. We leave all that to the judgement of God on the Day of Judgement -as it is written in the Qur'an and implemented by the Prophet

As for the dangers which emerge, freedom itself permits the means for this to be deal with

(6)

Justice must be the basis for dealings between rulers and ruled, seniors and juniors, capitalists and workers, men and women, etc., because all things in the spheres of work and relations can only be stable when based on justice. Specific groups cannot be given powers which enable them to affect the rights of others. This is a kind of injustice which is similar to unbelief and it should not be allowed

(7)

The real challenge facing Muslim countries today is economic, military, political and social backwardness. Putting an end to this backwardness can only be done by making "development" a cultural battle that takes place under the banner of Islam, because "development" is what is required of "Jihad". Every individual must be mobilized for this battle -from planning to following up and evaluating it. This development must be Humanitarian. It should start with the justice which can be achieved and reach the abundance which is required. Only faith produces the free energy required and channels it into development and overcoming obstacles without the need for the investments which make room for following the footsteps or being the hostages of the big states

Any attempt at development which submits to the claims of the World Bank or imitates European or American examples will only bring more backwardness, clashes and conflicts. In the same way, any attempt at development which is laid down by governments or experts without the participation of the masses and is not founded on faith, or which aims to further the interests of the few at the expense of the broad masses, is a development doomed to failure

(8)

The typical image of the contemporary Muslim is that which has been usually characterized negativity, attachment to the past, concentration on rituals and slogans, is not the picture of the Muslim in the days of the Prophet. The difference is because the short period time of the Prophetic message and the rightly guided Caliphs was not long enough (50 years) to deepen the roots of the Muslim personality. This was followed by the mordacious kings and the collapse of the Caliphate and the enclosure of the door of ijtiḥad (free thought) for more than a thousand years. Ignorance and oppression triumphed. All of this led to the image that is known today. This image is accepted by religious institutions and political regimes for reasons related to short sightedness, or the desire to secure vested interests.

We completely reject this picture and we strive for an Islamic Revival.

(9)

No Islamic revival can be achieved without a direct return to the Holy Qur'an and a reexamination of the Sunna. It must be freed from interpretations which were put by ancestors who were influenced by the spirit of their age, the dominance of ignorance, the tyranny of rulers and the difficulties in research and study. This has affected the interpretations of the Qur'an, the rules of Fiqh (jurisprudence) and the arts of Hadith (traditions of the Prophet). This has instilled notions which are narrow and contrary to the spirit of Islam. Islam was originally a call to save the people from darkness and bring them to the light, for the darkness to be replaced "The Book and the Balance" -in other words, knowledge and justice- in place of ignorance and injustice. It was also a call for the spreading of the values of good, justice, freedom, etc., which are the spirit of Islam. The rituals and slogans are the body of Islam, restricting one's self to these, is a celebration of a body without a soul. However, interpretation of the Qur'an is not -now- the important matter. The important matter is -as the Prophet said- to revolutionize the Qur'an

(10)

There is a fundamental truth, even if it has been hidden by dense fog. Each generation must live its own time without transgressing the supreme values of Islam. The social development of nations and peoples is like the physical development of individuals, it is a sign of health and an implementation of the universality of Islam, its objectivity and its suitability for every time and place

Islam does not monopolize wisdom, in fact it praises it wherever it is exist Islam accepts all expertise and presents its own. From this we can see that the propensity for a narrow isolationist position, taking the example of a long-gone society as the best example, intolerance of developments in arts and literature, the backward view of women and their imprisonment behind walls... all this contradicts the essence of Islam, its universality and its suitability for every time and place. It also contradicts what Almighty God wanted when He said ("O mankind: We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you". Qur'an: XLIX, 13)

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An Experiment of Islamic Renovation

The "Call for Islamic Revival"

By

Gamal El Banna

The first reference to the idea of an Islamic revival appeared in the chapter on "A new understanding of religion" in the book "New Democracy" produced by Gamal El Banna in 1946. He criticized the wave of enthusiasm that followed the rise of the Moslem Brotherhood at the time. He warned them "not to believe in faith, but to believe in the human being". His idea was further developed in his call for revival: "Islam targeted the human being, but the Muslim scholars targeted Islam".

However, the developments that followed upon that book, especially the military coup led by Abdel Nasser did not provide the adequate climate for that call to thrive. Furthermore, Gamal El Banna himself was throughout the fifties and sixties preoccupied with trade unionism before he returned again to the issue of Islam. And yet in 1952 he produced his book "The responsibility of decadence between the peoples and the rulers, as explained in the Holy Koran."

He also founded the Egyptian association for the care of prisoners and their families (1953-1955), which created a revolution in the reform of prison conditions and resulted in a confrontation with the authorities. However he returned to Islamic topics in the eighties and when he produced a number of Islamic books addressing various Islamic issues such as (Islam and rationalism) and (No and no again.. No to the imitating scholars and no to pretentious advocates of enlightenment), in addition to several studies of contemporary Islamic propositions (Islamic movements: pros and cons) and (A message to Islamic advocates) etc. He concluded those studies with his main work entitled (Towards a new Islamic jurisprudence) in three volumes in which he criticized fundamentalist Fikh and called for a new one, the foundations of which he presented in the third volume.

The call for Islamic revival is a very unique and distinct call from all the rest because of the following reasons:

First: The call for Islamic revival believes in openness and interaction with all cultures, knowledge and civilizations, not from a position of weakness or imitation or fabrication or selectivity, but on an original Koranic base. Gamal El Banna demonstrated that the Koran considers wisdom to be one of the origins of Islam side by side with El Kitab (The Book). He elaborated that this attitude opens up a wide horizon for acquiring knowledge and inspiration from all available sources. It also allows us to draw on all cultures and civilizations, including a different

attitude towards women, art, economics and politics. This, he claims, is precisely what Muslims did during the time of their renaissance before the door of Ijtihad was closed.

In addition to that creative, open approach towards the original principles of the religion, Gamal El Banna's all encompassing culture and knowledge supported this approach further. Since the publication of his first book (Three obstacles on the way to Glory: Ignorance, poverty and illness) in 1945 he never stopped reading. His readings included both old and contemporary European political thought, socialism and the history of popular and reformist movements etc. It is here that Gamal El Banna differs much from traditional Islamic advocates, whose culture is limited to old Islamic references or the "heritage" in the interpretation of Hadith and Fikh.

The publications of Gamal El Banna included a 300-page book on the (Birth and decline of the Weimar Republic) and another on (Workers' opposition during the time of Lenin) which was originally written by Ms. Kolontai. Gamal El Banna translated the book, adding to it an elaborate introduction that is almost as long as the original book. Among his other publications are a book on the history of workers' movements in Egypt (700 pages), a textbook in three volumes on trade union rights and liberties in addition to a book that documents his experience in prison reform and providing care for prisoners.

Second: The call for Islamic revival is a radical one. It is not a call for a partial reform or an attempt at patching up traditional Islamic knowledge. On the contrary, it puts aside all ancient and old knowledge, which is usually considered the reference for all Islamic advocacy and refers directly to the Koran without adherence to any of the acknowledged or traditional interpretations. It laid different foundations for Fikh other than those set by El Shafei, and formulated objectives for Islamic jurisprudence other than those proposed by El Shatbi and proposed an original theory of Sunni revelation that avoided the crisis of Sunna, which has dominated Islamic thought and Fikh for a long time. Only a call for an Islamic revival could have forwarded this, since all other Islamic scholars were one way or the other associated with fundamentalist thought or other contemporary traditional schools or disciplines, foremost "religious institutions" such as El Azhar in Egypt and Hozat in Iran etc. Furthermore many of those schools were associated with the ruling regimes.

Third: This radical renovation, which constitutes a revolution in Islamic thought, can hardly be charged with any of the many charges that are usually attributed to "innovators". Such charges range from being spies or fascinated by the West, superficiality of analysis or lack of mastery of the subject. Gamal El Banna comes from a family that is well established and renowned in Islamic advocacy. All through his life he maintained a clean

record and based his ideas on evidence that drew on the Koran, on common sense and logic and life realities. Furthermore he is a self sufficient and independent man with no ambition for high rank positions or posts since God almighty granted him the financial resources that saved him the need for work, that provided him with financial security and enabled him to cover the expenses of his writings and advocacy.

It is therefore that his writings can be only challenged by ignoring and withholding them.

The fact of the matter is that the Call for Islamic Revival is the only call that offers a comprehensive cultural Islamic plan. It addresses every aspect of society, each in a separate book that demonstrates an original vision on women, trade unions, economy poletics etc. All those visions are derived from a single original source and hence are free of fabrication and contradictions.

In addition to his Islamic books (about 40 in number) Gamal El Banna produced the following publications during the period 2001-2002.

1. Strategy for Islamic Da'awa (advocacy) in the 21st century as foreseen in the Call for Islamic Revival.
2. Our first demand is FREEDOM.
3. Revolutionizing the Koran.
4. Plurality in a Moslem society.
5. The veil.

Also forthcoming is a book entitled "Islam: a religion and a nation.. not a religion and a state". It settles the issue of governance in Islam, which has created much debate and controversy for long periods of time.

The Islamic Renaissance Fellowship

A position paper by

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-I-

The starting point of the Islamic Renaissance Fellowship (IRF), as well as its pivotal idea, is the "deputized human" on earth. In the allegory of creation, almighty God, in His divine wisdom, made the human to be His "khalifa," literally successor or vice regent on earth. In Islam as a strict monotheistic religion, this is the highest honor bestowed upon any creature, indeed. And in order to affirm that honor, God ordered the angels to prostrate themselves to Adam, where prostration is never performed except to God alone.

Thus, Adam was created from the earthen clay to signify his affinity with the earth, and as God breathed life into Adam, He instilled in him awareness, passion, conscience, and will. Then God "taught him the names of all things," a figurative expression referring to equipping him with the keys to knowledge: mind, passion and rationality. In turn, the earth was created as a most unique planet among the millions of heavenly bodies: having temperate environment; surrounded by oceans; festooned with rivers, lakes, valleys and high rising mountains that are laden with treasures and minerals; and populated by a most fecund animal and plant kingdoms. All what is on earth is indeed capable of satisfying all human needs, and more.

In this context, Islam came to guide the deputized human toward establishing a just society that enables humans to perform righteous deeds for the optimum utilization of the earth, without molesting or ruining it. The Qur'an contains numerous verses that associate "belief with performing constructive deeds" (Ieeman wa al-amal essalih." Thus, Islam, is the means for guidance, and not a goal in itself.

-II-

Prophet Muhammad understood that fact very well, as he endeavored to establish on this earth, in Medina, a society that provided humans with splendor and dignity; and he instituted the values required for such a society, which revolved around equality, where all Muslims are "like the teeth of a comb," with no one above the law. The prophet himself applied

tort law upon himself, like anybody else. Each and every one had equal rights and obligations, be they black or white, men or women, rich or poor. The established system of law and order ensured peace and security, dispelled hostility and discord, and precluded the need for neither police nor prisons; and the "zakah," which was instituted as an obligatory contribution of 2.5% by the rich and able to provide for the poor and the needy, created a most cohesive social welfare system. That Medina society was truly an "Islam for humans," consistent with the grand design of making humans God's deputies (khulaf'a) to inherit the earth.

In such a society, there was no need to promulgate a separate Magna Carta or a Human Rights document, for human rights as we now know them existed as the prevalent ethos permeating every aspect of social life. Once more, the Medina's "Islam for the benefit of humans" was a practical example of how humans can fulfill the promise of being the inheritors of the earth, and actually live in a cohesive society organized around equality, justice, compassion, fellowship and an environmentally-friendly sufficiency.

-III-

However, that ideal Medina society did not last but a quarter of a century: ten years with the prophet, two years under the first Caliph, Abou Bakr, and ten years under the second Caliph, Omar who preferred to be called "Guardian of the Believers" (Ameeral-Mu'mineen), instead of Caliph. The dagger thrust in him in an assassination attempt seemed to have also dealt a mortal blow to the entire Medina society, particularly with the deviation of the third Caliph, Othman, from the firmly established principles and ideals affirmed by his two predecessors. The feuds, hostilities and mutinous attacks that followed led to the horrendous assassination of Caliph Othman while he was reading the Qur'an, and the chopping of his wife's fingers as she tried to deflect the assassins' blows. A cruel civil war soon ensued, where in the "Battle of the Camel," Muslims surrounding the howdah of the Honorable Aisha were directing their swords and arrows against the other Muslims in order to defend it; and in the Siffain battle, Muslims were fighting each other. The assassination of the fourth Caliph, Ali Ibn Abi Talib, while he was trying to reestablish that ideal "Islamic society for the benefit of humans," brought an end to that era at year 40 AH (After Hegira, the year marking the beginning of the Islamic calendar in 660 AD). In that year, Muawiya Ibn Abi Sufyan established the Umayyad dynasty, a despotic Caliphate rule, not in the least dissimilar to the worst of the Roman and the Persian empires: authoritarian, tyrannical and hereditary. It was from then on that the hitherto established "Islam for the benefit of humans" was subverted to an "Islam for the Sultan" with the establishment of that hereditary Caliphate institution that lasted until Mustafa Kamal Ataturk terminated it in 1924.

There were many reasons for that setback. In addition to the subversion of the Medina principles mentioned above, millions of the entrenched elements in the societies through which Islam rapidly expanded not only endorsed the new religion due to its simplicity and tolerance, but also occupied the highest ranks in its academic circles, and assumed leading scholarly roles in most all religious areas including interpretation of the Qur'an, Arabic literature, "fiqh," (Islamic jurisprudence) and "hadeeth," (collection and documentation of the sayings of the prophet). But most of those scholars unwittingly introduced into their scholarships ideas and understandings from their civilizations, thus distancing Islam from its simplicity and authentic spirit, and resulted in the rise of numerous factions, divisions and congregations, some of which were goaded and further fragmented by the inclusion of warped translations of some Greek philosophies in the Abbasid period. There were also some malicious efforts to adulterate Islam itself.

In the course of the centuries that followed, a traditional "Islam for the Sultan" body of knowledge was accumulating until it became throughout the years a petrified and hardened reality, resulting in what is now called "Islam al-Sunna wal gama'a," meaning the unanimously agreed upon traditional, or "salafi," Islamic jurisprudence, beliefs, creed and doctrine, that everybody must follow and no one dare to depart from or improve upon. The "salafi" Imams and scholars who devised that literature were sanctified and their thoughts were reified as a sacred text until the early Islamic renaissance movement by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and his students in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Islamic renaissance movement was not able to do away with that petrified thought, however, mainly because the reformers were bogged down by the assaults of European colonialism, which imposed itself on the Muslim world, and tried to weaken it and to enfeeble the Arabic language. Thus, the Islamic reform efforts by Al-Afghani and his colleagues were sapped and deflected by their concentration on fighting the menacing colonialism, and that left the arena to the entrenched "salafi" figures and their archaic institutions to not only overshadow the budding renaissance movement, but to also monopolize religious activities and claim to be the only ones representing Islam. On the other hand, the intelligentsia in Islamic societies did not contribute much to the Islamic renaissance efforts, as many of them were not versed in Islamic thought or jurisprudence, and some committed themselves to socialistic or nationalistic orientations which they propagated from their academic pulpits or media platforms, especially when they were appointed as functionaries by the state.

It was therefore incumbent upon The Islamic Renaissance Fellowship to carry out the Islamic renaissance mission, and to reorient and reorganize current Islamic thought and practice. Thus, in 1946, the founder of the IRF, Mr. Gamal Al-Banna, issued the book titled "A New Democracy," in which he dedicated a section to "A New Understanding of Religion" that was mainly critical of the Muslim Brothers and their supporters, who were then at the peak their strength. He implored them in that section to not concentrate mainly on dogmatic slogans, but rather to focus on the "Islam for Humans" themes and ideas which he formulated. That central theme of "Islam for Humans" continued since then, lasting for sixty years in a state of formulation and reformulation until it became full fledged in the year 2000 with the issuing of the book "Nahw Fiqh Jadeed," or Toward a New Islamic Jurisprudence.

The first step was to highlight the pivotal principle of "Islam for humans" as inheritors of the earth, and to provide ample supporting evidence of that central principle from the Qur'an; and then to show that the prophet actually applied these principles in the Medina society in the short time it lasted under him, as well as under the first two Caliphs Abou Bakr and Omar. Every effort was exerted to clarify by supporting evidence that the Medina society was in fact based on equality and justice, and provided the individual with utmost safety and security.

Afterwards, it was shown how the "Islam for humans" Medina society ended 40 years after its establishment, when Muawiya Ibn Abi Sufyan established his despotic, authoritarian and hereditary rule, which he misleadingly called an Islamic Caliphate, as mentioned above.

The goal of the Islamic Renaissance Fellowship is to return to the principles of the Medina society, particularly that it considers the modern age to be conducive to the re-establishment of such a society through the reconstruction of Islamic knowledge and information along the lines of "Islam for humans," instead of the hitherto prevalent "Islam for the Sultan." In order to pave the way toward that goal, the IRF issued a number of books that explain the bases for the new reconstruction and the principles underlying it.

These books include more than thirty volumes dealing with such aspects as politics, women, freedom of belief and freedom of expression, prevalent Islamic movements, prevalent Islamic Creed, "Tafseer," or interpretation, and "Hadeeth," or the sayings of the prophet.

-VII-

The principles of the "Islam for humans" endorsed by the IRF, as gleaned from the Qur'an, are as follows:

- (1) The goal of Islam is to enable the "deputized humankind" to inherit the earth. As such, Islam is not a goal in itself, but rather the means to attain that goal.

- (2) Equality of rights and obligations among all peoples, without exceptions, is the societal foundation of the “deputized human,” the inheritor of the earth.
- (3) The human mind and the knowledge it is capable of providing is what differentiates humans from all other creatures, and the explanation why God asked the angels to prostrate themselves to Adam. The mind with its intellect is therefore the foundation of religious thinking, such that nothing is beyond its grasp save the nature of God and the hereafter. It follows that scientific knowledge and information must permeate all aspects of society.
- (4) The direct return to the actual text of the Qur’an as the book for human guidance in its totality, and eschewing the archaic interpretations including its so called “reasons of revelation” for certain verses, or the abrogation of some Qur’anic verses by subsequent revelations (naskh). The impact of the Qur’an is actualized by direct intimacy with its text, and its wording contains the power of guidance.
- (5) The “Sunna,” or the sayings of the prophet, must be adjusted to and adjudged by the Qur’an, and not the other way around; and it should never have the same weight as the Qur’an. Understanding
- (6) The main foundations of Islamic thought and action must be wisdom, acumen, compassion and understanding, as stated repeatedly in the Qur’an.
- (7) The “zakah” must be considered for what it is, as an obligatory pillar of Islam; and its collection must be organized to become the basis of a viable “social welfare and insurance” system.
- (8) Considering “shari’a” edicts and laws dealing with worldly matters, whether revealed in the Qur’an or instituted by the “Sunna,” to have been thus revealed or instituted mainly for their justice and benefit functionality. They must therefore be continuously changed, adjusted or aligned to the prevailing social changes and developments in order that they retain their functionality, as what Caliph Omar did very early in Islamic life.
- (9) Rejecting the inviolability of the “salafi” texts and deemphasizing their significance in as much as they endeavor to impose bygone thought on current conditions. We simply cannot live our present through their archaic thoughts and texts. Doing away with the untenable notion that Islam must underlie and govern all aspects of human endeavors and thoughts, or must restrict or inhibit any field of knowledge such as philosophy, science, technology or the arts. Each one of these fields of knowledge has its own logic and methodology, and must never be considered antithetical or adverse to Islam.
- (10) Freedom of speech, thought and of belief are absolute; and the relationship between religions must be predicated upon peaceful coexistence and mutual respect.
- (11) Granting women equality with men, and rejecting the “salafi” texts that assign inferior status to them, as most of these texts are based on fabricated and unreliable sayings of the prophet (hadeeth).