

# Forerunners of “Political Islam”: An inquiry into the Ideologies of Al-Banna and Al-Mawdudi

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## Abstract

The early twentieth century witnessed the emergence of several Islamic movements in the Muslim world. Arguably, two of these movements have been more influential than certain others, namely, *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* (Muslim Brotherhood) in Egypt and *Jamaat-e-Islami* (Muslim Community) in Pakistan. This paper aims to analyze the ideologies of their founders with a view to determining the influence they continue to have upon the similar religio-political movements today in the Muslim World and elsewhere.

**Key Words:** Political Islam, Hasan al-Banna, Abu'l-A'la Mawdudi, Ikhwan al-Muslimun, Jamaat-e-Islami

## “Siyasal İslâm”ın Öncüleri: El-Benna ve el-Mevdûdî'nin İdeolojileri Üzerine Bir Analiz

### Öz

Yirminci yüzyılın ilk dönemi, İslam Dünyası'nda bazı etkili dini-siyasi sosyal hareketlerin ortaya çıktığı bir dönemdir. Öyle anlaşıyor ki bu hareketlerin en güçlüleri Mısır merkezli İhvan-i Müslimîn ve Pakistan merkezli Cemaat-i İslamî'dir. Bu hareketlerin öteki benzer hareketlere oranla daha etkili olduğu hususunda neredeyse bir konsensüs olduğu söylenebilir. Bu makale, söz konusu sosyal siyasal ve dini hareketlerin, takip eden yıllarda ortaya çıkan benzer hareketleri nasıl etkilediğini belirleyebilmek amacıyla, kurucularının ideolojilerini araştırmayı hedeflemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Siyasal İslâm, Hasan el-Bennâ, Ebu'l-A'la Mevdûdî, İhvan-i Müslimîn, Cemaat-i İslami

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## Background of the problem

Coupled with the colonial imperialism, modernity has had some serious secularising effects more in certain societies than others. But it has also paved the way for powerful religio-political counter-movements especially within the Muslim World since the first quarter of the twentieth Century, which continue to have impact upon the religious and political movements today. Two of those major religio-political movements emerged in the Muslim World are the Ikhwan al-Muslimun of Egypt and the Jamaat-e- Islami of Pakistan.

The question of why these movements emerged at this particular time of history is a multifaceted one, and cannot be given an exhaustive answer. One can mention some of the most significant reasons for this emergence, however. First of all, the Ottoman Empire, which had been the major representative of the Muslim world for nearly six centuries, had disintegrated. Although some Arab nations had various religious and political problems with the empire, the significance of the existence of such a major power in the region was undeniable. This significance was felt only after its disintegration and during the ensuing years when the region has become a battlefield for the invading powers. The second reason is related to the first one. When the Ottomans became weak and could not protect the nations that had been under its control for centuries, the conquering European armies subjugated the Muslim lands during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And finally, many Muslims regarded the existence of the West in their lands as a threat not only for their religious and cultural heritage, but for their national identity as well. The colonial powers have always been accused of being not satisfied with military and political domination, but of aiming at the eradication of Islamic culture, civilisation and intellectual output in the effort to obliterate the religion of Islam- a belief that still echoes in the minds of the people from among different strata of Muslim societies.

One can enlarge the list of reasons, like failure of nationalist secular élites, lack of political participation, the impact of modernism, lack of intellectual progress etc. I do not intend to dwell on these reasons in detail because for many Muslims these and other possible reasons are the natural result of the following reason: Muslim nations have gone stray from God's true path (*Sirat-ı Mustakim*). The only cure for this epidemic is to turn to the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

I have stated that the beginning of the twentieth century saw the

emergence of several Islamic movements in the Muslim world. Accordingly, two of these movements have been more influential, namely, *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* (Muslim Brotherhood) in Egypt and *Jamaat-e-Islami* (Muslim Community) in Pakistan. Whereas the former has been seen as a fundamentalist movement, the latter was put into the revivalist category by some Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Both of them, however, have been fundamentalist in the eyes of the majority of the western scholars.

This paper argues first, that there is no clear evidence to support the argument that these two movements are utterly different from one another; for both the movements held the similar views as regards "pure" and "undiluted" Islam in their program as well as claiming Islam was a comprehensive way of life. The differences between the two, if any, may emanate from the different environments, and from class characteristics and political conditions of the two countries. Second, and perhaps more importantly, these movements continue to be the major ideological force behind the religio-political movements of today anywhere in the Muslim World.

### **A Word on Fundamentalism**

Before entering into the discussion of the ideologies of these movements a word on the term "Fundamentalism" is in place. Defining fundamentalism is a problem. In effect, the act of defining any object is a problem, for "definitions are tools; they are to some degree, arbitrary; they lay stress on similarities within a delimited area and on the differences outside it, thus giving emphasis to one aspect of reality."<sup>1</sup>

The term fundamentalism belongs originally to the movement which began early in the twentieth century among evangelical Protestants who believed in the following doctrine: The verbal inerrancy of the Bible, preserving it completely from error in the original manuscripts; the Deity of Christ, his Virgin Birth, the substitutionary Atonement of Christ, and his physical resurrection and coming bodily return to earth.<sup>2</sup> But later both the media and even many scholars have adopted it to describe any, even,

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<sup>1</sup> J. Milton Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion*, The Macmillan Company, London 1970, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, "Fundamentalism and /or Orthodoxy? Toward an Understanding of the Fundamentalist Phenomenon", *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* (ed. Norman J. Cohen), Grand Rapids, Michigan 1990, p. 2.

orthodox religion in struggle with secular modernity all over the world. Many religious movements, which see themselves as the defenders of their religion and more specifically of their fatherland and heritage, in the Muslim world can be put into this category. These scholars believe that it is possible and legitimate to study some of the religious movements under the term fundamentalism that have a lot in common. As a result there are Islamic fundamentalism, Buddhist fundamentalism, Catholic fundamentalism, Sikh fundamentalism, Jewish fundamentalism and so on.

Being an American Protestant phenomenon, is it really legitimate to use the term fundamentalism to describe the *other* but *similar* religious movements that may be shaped by different historical, cultural and sociopolitical conditions? This question has created some significant problems all over the world in general, and in the Muslim world in particular. Many leading Muslim, and some non-Muslim scholars of Islam believe that the use of the term fundamentalism in the context of Islam is unfortunate and misleading, for

...The term is drawn from the Christian context, where it has quite a different connotation. Fundamentalism in Christian religious circles, especially in the United States, refers to conservative forms of Protestantism, usually antimodernist, with a rather narrow and literal interpretation of the Bible and strong upon traditional Christian ethics.<sup>3</sup>

Fredrick M. Denny, a Christian scholar of Islam, holds that "the term (fundamentalism) does not quite apply, when taken in its original meaning."<sup>4</sup>

I too believe that it would be misleading to use the term fundamentalism as a generic term and apply it to all religious movements. First of all, as a hermeneutical principle, every religious movement or any event for that matter has to be treated as an individual phenomenon by taking account the context in which it came to existence. Otherwise our approach would be superfluous and reductionistic. However, I differ from those who are against the act of re-contextualization, I do not reject the category of fundamentalism believing that a term cannot be transferred from its original context. Quite the contrary, I too think, as Dr. Sayyid does, that "re-contextualization" is the

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<sup>3</sup> S. Hussain Nasr, "Present Tendencies, Future Trends", *Islam: The Religious and Political Life of a World Community* (ed. Marjorie Kelly), Praeger, New York 1984, p. 279.

<sup>4</sup> Fredric M. Denny, *Islam and Muslim Community*, Harper & Row, New York 1987, p. 117.

only viable vehicle of carrying out an intellectual inquiry. My problem with fundamentalism, however, is that it is a category which can only be sustained by avoiding a radical re-contextualization.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, my objection is not aimed at the comparative method itself. But, comparisons are only useful when and if similar kinds of things are being compared, a common ground exists for comparing them. My criticism of fundamentalism is based on the impossibility of using it as the ground upon which to carry out a meaningful comparison between, for instance, the al-Hamas of Palestine, the Justice and Development Party in Turkey, which is a constitutional political party, and has had the support of the Turkish society for quite some time, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Christian Coalition, Boko Haram and so on.

Secondly, there is a tendency in the media and among the scholars of dismissing a religious movement simply as religious fanaticism without examining it in detail. In this case, the meaning of fanaticism and fundamentalism is mixed and they are used interchangeably. A typical discourse on, for instance, the Muslim Brotherhood runs as follows:

The Muslim Brotherhood was a militant group, which believed in sufficiency and supremacy of Islam and *literal interpretation* of the Qur'an and the Sunnah...*Unlike Abduh*, the Brotherhood did not think that a *restatement* of Islamic doctrines was necessary. <sup>6</sup> (My emphasis)

Any unbiased interpreter of the movement will readily realize that the above statement does not capture accurately, as we will see, the character of the Muslim Brotherhood or account for a variety of interpretations advanced by the leaders of this movement such as al-Banna, S. Qutb, M. Qutb, and so on. None of those leaders advocate a literal interpretation of the Qur'an; nor do they think that Islamic doctrines are in no need of restatement. Naturally, their interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet differed sharply, in some cases, from that of traditional 'Ulama. However, they never asserted that the Qur'an has to be understood literally. For this reason, especially traditional Sunni 'Ulama have tended to oppose their interpretation; regarding this type of interpretation as too allegorical. But this does not deny the fact that there have been/are those movements who advocate a literal interpretation of the Qur'an in theory but interpret it allegorically in practice.

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<sup>5</sup> For a provocative essay on the topic, see Bobby S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*, Zed Books, London 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Yahya Armajani, *Middle East: Past and Present*, Princeton Hall Inc., NJ 1970, p. 288.

And finally, that no term corresponding to what fundamentalism means in its original context has traditionally existed in various Islamic languages may demonstrate such a concept is not integral or organic to the Islamic worldview.<sup>7</sup>

If the term "fundamental(s)" means "principle(s)" or "essential(s)", its equivalent in Arabic is *usul*. No Muslim who knows the English language would have any problem at all referring to themselves as fundamentalists because they do believe in the fundamentals of Islam such as belief in God, the Last day, the Angels, the Books, the Messengers and so on. Furthermore, in the classical sense of the word, fundamentalists believe in the doctrines of inerrancy of the Bible, and Virgin Birth of Jesus and so on. It is not striking to note that every believing Muslim, with the possibility of few exceptions, believe in the inerrancy of their Scripture, the Qur'an. Again, they all believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus which is another fundamental of Islam because it is clearly stated as an historical event in the Qur'an. Now is it reasonable to conclude, then, that Islam originally is a fundamentalist religion and a Muslim is a fundamentalist in principle? It depends on the sense in which we are using the terms "religion"<sup>8</sup> and "fundamentalism". If Islam is a fundamentalist religion, then the question arises: Is Islamic fundamentalism good or bad? If above-mentioned fundamentals are good, then Islamic fundamentalism is good and *vice versa*.

Why then the media and even some serious scholar keep using this controversial term? There may be two answers to the question. First, many Muslim scholars such as Abdur-Rahman Momin, Professor Nasr etc., content that the term Islamic fundamentalism is used deliberately to ignore, distort

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<sup>7</sup> Nasr, "Present Tendencies", p. 280.

<sup>8</sup> Note that there is not a single agreed upon definition of religion in comparative religious studies. The current definition of religion is the product of a particular history, in which religion is a distinct sphere of life and does not deal with other aspects of life, especially with politics. If it does deal with the problems of social and political life, then it is regarded as the violation of the very definition of religion. But as it is well known Muslims still believe that there is no separation between religion and social life in Islam. Obviously, religion takes on a different meaning in this context. Now it becomes the name of a set of rules around which a particular community or communities organise their lives without living anything outside of it.

and misrepresent the contemporary reality of Islamic resurgence.<sup>9</sup> The defenders of this argument always gives the tragic events as examples like, the tragedy of Oklahoma bombing, 9/11, London Bombing, Charlie Habdo attack, and how the media and some politicians tried to link the event to an outside cause that may have its roots in the Middle East. But facts have proven them to be wrong in many cases when we found out that some of the perpetrators of these events were home-grown. However, Muslims felt the pressure and saw themselves as potential suspects. In effect, they were looked at that way. Again, whenever there is a suicide bombing in the streets of Jerusalem, Paris and elsewhere, the entire Muslim world feels the pressure and is hold responsible. When a woman with her scarf is seen, say visiting the Capitol in Washington, she is always asked whether or not she was from the Middle East, which is the center of Islamic fundamentalism, failing to realize that even an American-Muslim woman can wear the same scarf because of her belief. These may seem extreme examples, but this is the way Muslims see the problem.

Secondly, there are scholars who study the religious movements under the banner fundamentalism, believing that it is by no means exhaustive in explaining these movements. However, for now it is the only possible term that can be used to explain these religious movements that have a lot in common. In other words, there are family resemblances among them. This is not a well-founded answer because those of who study some of the leading belief systems of the world can find plenty of similarities among them. However, this has not, yet, led any serious scholar to conclude that all religions are the same in essence, for they also realise that these religions have different worldviews, goals and means to achieve these goals. Nor do they believe that they are utterly different, rather many of the serious scholars have concluded that there is a differentiated commonness among these belief systems. Therefore, Christianity is "Christianity", Islam is "Islam" and Buddhism is still called "Buddhism" with its various interpretations, sects, and denominations. The aim of this paper is not to enter into full discussion of these problems, but it must be made clear that no movement, religious or otherwise, can be understood properly without taking into consideration the context in which that movement was shaped. And every movement has its own peculiarities that make it different, unique, "other" from the whole host of other movements.

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<sup>9</sup> Abdur-Rahman Momin, "On Islamic Fundamentalism", *Hamdard Islamicus*, 10 (1987), p. 36.

It is difficult to characterise these movements as either fundamentalist or revivalist, for there is no objective set of criteria by which to judge our evaluations. Again, sometimes it is impossible to determine what exactly makes a movement “fundamentalist,” “revivalist,” “fanatic,” or extremist and the differences among them. However, as it has been indicated repeatedly, there are certainly some elements that represent fundamentalist tendencies, but there are also some elements that represent orthodox tendencies. There are still some elements that can be labeled as the characteristics of fanaticism, extremism, or even terrorism. Therefore, those of us who are to enter into a genuine dialog with the people of other cultures have to be extremely careful while making general statements about them.

Having briefly presented the current situation of fundamentalism debate, it is time to meet the two most powerful religious movements in the Muslim world: Ikhwan Al-Muslimun and Jamaat-e-Islami.<sup>10</sup> Instead of giving an over all picture of Ikhwan Al-Muslimun and Jamaat-e-Islami, I prefer to focus on only one representative figure to avoid running the risk of presenting another reductionistic approach. Studying the ideology of Ikhwan Al-Muslimun in its own context is important because by exploring al-Banna’s vision, for instance, it will be possible to grasp some of the most relevant ideological features that nowadays still inform what has been called a ‘mainstream’ tendency of “Islamism” or “political Islam.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Since my primary objective is to try to sort out the ideologies of these movements, more correctly the ideologies of their founders in their own times, the current situation and the historical development of these movements will be omitted. However, I have found the following works helpful regarding these issues: Gehad Ahuda, "The 'Normalization' of the Islamic Movements in Egypt From 1970s to the Early 1990s", *Accounting for Fundamentalism: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994, pp. 374-412; Rafiuddin Ahad, "Redefining Muslim Identity in South Asia: The Transformation of the Jamaat-e-Islami", *Accounting for Fundamentalism: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994, pp. 669-705; Andrea Mura, "The Inclusive Dynamics of Islamic Universalism: From the Vantage Point of Sayyid Qutb’s Critical Philosophy", *Comparative Philosophy*, 5 (2014/1), pp. 29-54; Mona El-Ghobashy, "The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 37 (Aug.2005/3), pp. 373-395; Mohammed Zaid, *The Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt's Succession Crisis: The Politics of Liberation and Reform in the Middle East*, I.B. Tauris Publishers, New York 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Andrea Mura, "A Genealogical Inquiry into Early Islamism: The Discourse of Hasan al-Banna", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 17 (2012/1), p. 62.



## **Ikhwan Al-Muslimun (The Muslim Brotherhood)**

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the emergence of the first powerful Islamic movement in Egypt. Earlier the influence of men such as Afghani and Abduh, who have been regarded as the pioneers of the modernist movements, from Al-Azhar in Cairo had awakened the Muslims to a new consciousness of the suppression of their Islamic identity while tied to the yoke of colonialism.<sup>12</sup> But, in giving it to a political expression and direction through Islam, as we will see, the credit must only go to one man, Hasan al-Banna, the founder and the leader of the Ikhwan al-Muslimun (hereafter "Ikhwan") until his assassination.

Banna was born in the province of Buhraya in Egypt. His father was an Imam and he was brought up with a strict religious training. By the age of twelve while still at school, he became involved with the work of various religious societies, which helped him in the development of his skills and organizational abilities. In 1923 he went to Cairo to study at the Dar al-Ulum. In 1927, at the age of twenty-one, Banna graduated from the Dar al-Ulum and took up a job in the state school system.<sup>13</sup> He was active in working for Islam during his teaching career but he was not content with it. He longed for collective action in the service of his belief system, Islam. In 1928 he founded the Ikhwan together with his friends from Ismailiya, and become known as the first *Murshid-i Aam* (The Supreme Guide) and continued to strengthen the foundations of Ikhwan until his death.

Banna is regarded as a man of charisma, which helped him establish and spread the thoughts of Ikhwan to such an extent that even in his life-time branches of the movement were established not only in Egypt but also in neighbouring countries such as Syria, Jordan, Sudan, Algeria, Palestine and Iraq.<sup>14</sup> Today most of the Islamic movements that are spread all over the world have been/are influenced, directly or indirectly, by the thought of the Ikhwan.

In those early years of the movement, which can be regarded as a pre-political period, represent one of the finest modern examples of deep Muslim

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<sup>12</sup> Hussain Asaf, *Islamic Movements in Egypt, Pakistan and Iran*, Mansell Publishing Limited, London 1983, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Asaf, *Islamic Movements*, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Abidin, "The Political Thought of Hasan Al-Banna", *Hamdard Islamicus*, 9 (1988), p. 55.

piety, finely aggressive against formalism and complacency and earnestly set for a religious renewal. This aggressiveness against formalism, and deep Muslim piety was given to the movement by Banna, for he was associated with the Hasafiya Sufi Order. Banna's attachment to this Sufi order imbued him with a strong sense of the importance of the relationship between the leader and follower or disciple. In 1932 he moved the Ikhwan's headquarters to Cairo where its membership increased and included a cross-section of Egyptian society, ranging from civil servants, students urban laborers to peasants.<sup>15</sup> After the move to Cairo, Banna developed his movement into a political instrument.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Ideology of the Ikhwan**

The Ikhwan has developed a whole system of and a framework of thought and analysis, which represents its ideology. These ideas were formulated in great detail by Banna. It would not be wrong to say that the political philosophy of Banna is the ideology of the Ikhwan. This does not necessarily mean that there were no other charismatic leaders after him. Quite the contrary, there have been many influential figures like S.Qutb, whose ideas were even more radical than that of Banna, M. Qutb, 'Udwan etc. But, again, it was Banna whose ideas have been more dominant throughout the history of the Ikhwan.

Banna shared with earlier Muslim reformers like Afghani and Abduh the belief that Muslim weakness and vulnerability to European domination stemmed from Muslim's deviation from "true" Islam. In order to revive Egypt, Muslims had to recommit themselves to understanding and living according to Islam as defined by its scripture, the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, whose the ideal leader for every believing Muslim. The seventh century Islamic State under the Prophet Mohammad and the early Caliphs represented the concrete historical manifestation of a comprehensive Islamic order. Under the subsequent rulers the Muslim realm grew weaker as a result of several factors:

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<sup>15</sup> Hussain, *Islamic Moments*, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Gragg, *Islamic Surveys: Counsels in Contemporary Islam*, Edinburgh University, Edinburgh 1965, p. 115.

1. Political differences, partisanship, and struggle for supremacy and prestige...
2. Religious differences, sectarianism, and turning away from religion...
3. (Rule's) self-indulgence in luxuries and comforts...
4. The transfer of the authority to non-Arabs- i.e., Persians, Memluks, Turks, and others who never absorbed genuine Islam, and whose hearts had never been illuminated with the light of the Qur'an...<sup>17</sup>

By the thirteenth century these factors rendered the Muslim world vulnerable to the Mongol invasion and Crusades. While a period of revival followed under Memluks and Ottomans, Muslims remained uninterested in affairs beyond their realm and therefore neglected Europe's achievements in science and politics, which paved the way for its global hegemony in the modern age. By the early twentieth century, Muslim world from North Africa to Indonesia had come under European domination.<sup>18</sup>

The Muslim world's political and scientific subordination rendered it susceptible to European cultural influence. Banna believed that European civilization consisted of atheism, immorality, individual and class selfishness, and usury. He characterized European culture as a materialistic one that offered Muslims loans in order to gain control of Muslim economies. Furthermore, Europeans founded schools that indoctrinate adulation of the West among Muslim élites and depicted Islam as defective.<sup>19</sup>

To compound the harmful effects of European culture, most Muslims misunderstood and therefore, misrepresented their own religion. They thought that it consisted only of the rituals of worship and the moral and spiritual aspects of life. Banna believed that the scholars of Al-Azhar bore a shared responsibility for Muslim's incorrect notions of their religion. He regarded Azhari 'Ulama as men anchored to irrelevant interpretations of Islam, steeped in the concerns and methods of a bygone age.<sup>20</sup>

That is why Banna considered that primary objectives of the Ikhwan were:

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<sup>17</sup> Hasan Al-Banna, "Between Yesterday and Today", *Five Tracts of Hasan al-Banna* (trans. Charless Wendell), University of California Press, Berkley 1975, pp. 18-19.

<sup>18</sup> Banna, "Between Yesterday and Today", pp. 22-24.

<sup>19</sup> Banna, "Yesterday and Today", pp. 26-28.

<sup>20</sup> David Comins, "Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949)" *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (ed. Ali Rahmena), Zed Books, London 1994, p. 134.

1. The liberation of the whole Muslim world from every foreign domination.
2. The establishment of an Islamic state in the Muslim world which implements the Laws of Islam and its social system, and propagates its message to mankind.<sup>21</sup>

Banna held that in order to accomplish these objectives, Muslims have to turn to “true” and “pure” Islam, and regarded it as a total way of life. The significant characteristic of the Ikhwan was the manner in which it presents Islam as a comprehensive way of life and the wide range of activities and training in which it was involved.

This comprehensive understanding of Islam, which was supposed to have been substantiated from the Qur’an and the Sunnah, has widely influenced religious and political thinking in Muslim world. As a total way of life, Banna believed that religion is integral to human life which also defines human conduct in everyday life from religious preaching, economic business, education to military training, and sports.

According to Banna, a true understanding of Islam requires familiarity with the Qur’an and the Sunnah, the authoritative sources of deriving Islam’s rule for every circumstances. Even though Islam was over 1300 years old, its general principles are sufficiently flexible for adaptation to any place or time. He argued that, like his modernist mentors Abduh and Afghani, Islam defines objectives and sets basic principles and does not give detailed legislation. Thus people had no reason to fear the rules of Islam because it is flexible and opened to evolution and social change.<sup>22</sup> Put differently, Banna did not believe that a community of interpreters in a particular society and at a particular time can exhaust the meaning of the Qur’an once and for all. Rather, he believed that a restatement of Islamic doctrines was legitimate and necessary, for the Qur’an speaks to humankind as a whole regardless of people’s cultural, social and political background. For this reason there may be disagreement among the believers on the minor points of law,<sup>23</sup> which is derived from the Qur’an, but such differences would not lead to enmity among *Ummah*, the Muslim Nation. Therefore, Muslims must devote

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<sup>21</sup> Banna, “Between Yesterday and Today”, p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> Hasan al-Banna, “Our Mission”, *Five Tracts of Hasan al-Banna* (trans. Charles Wendel), University of California Press, Berkley 1975, pp. 46-47.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Abdin, “Political Thought”, p. 60.

<sup>24</sup> Banna, “Our Mission”, p. 58.

themselves to studying Scripture in order to base their conformity with Islam on understanding rather than blind obedience to religious authorities.

As for the Issue of faith and belief, Banna had similar ideas with traditional 'Ulama and differed from both some American-Christian and Islamic fundamentalist movements. For him, anyone who professes belief in God and prophecy of Muhammad, and who acts according to that belief is Muslim, whether he or she is a sinful person. He considers unbelief (infidelity) to consists of open declaration of apostasy, denial of beliefs or practices which are the part of Islam, and deliberate distortion of meaning of the Qur'an. <sup>24</sup>

Liberating Muslim world from every foreign domination and establishing an Islamic state required a substantial sociopolitical change in society. Given the wide contours of his Islamic state, Banna did not call for the overthrow of Egypt's political order. Rather, he sought to reform it. He notes that, Islam requires the establishment of a government to prevent anarchy and chaos but does not stipulate any particular form of government. It lays down three principles: First, the ruler is responsible to God and the people. Second, the Muslim nation must act in a unified manner because brotherhood among believers is a principle of faith. Third, the respect for *Ummah's* will; the Muslim nation has the right to monitor the ruler's action, and to give advice to the ruler. <sup>25</sup>

Since these are such broad principles, Islamic State can take many forms, including a constitutional parliamentary democracy. But as a long-term goal, Banna believed that "Muslims should reestablish the Islamic caliphate because it is a symbol of unity." <sup>26</sup> Again, because the Egyptian constitution stated that "Islam is the religion of the state," Banna considered Egypt's constitution 1923 valid. <sup>27</sup> He even stated that the constitutional government was the closest of all existing political systems to Islamic government. However, he was not satisfied with the current constitution, for he asserted that Egyptian law did not strictly forbid matters prohibited in Islam like alcohol, prostitution, gambling, and usury. Moreover, Banna criticized the adaptation of foreign law codes for commerce because Islam possessed

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<sup>24</sup> Banna, "Our Mission", p. 135.

<sup>25</sup> Abdin, "Political Thought", p. 59.

<sup>26</sup> Abdin, "Political Thought", p. 58.

<sup>27</sup> Abdin, "Political Thought", p. 58.

ample regulations for all matters.<sup>28</sup>

While admitting that Islam endorses a constitutional parliamentary democracy, Banna rejected any role for a multiparty system in an Islamic state. He observed that a parliamentary system may have several parties, but Egypt's experience showed that a multiparty system violates the fundamental Islamic value of national unity by showing divisiveness. In deed, Banna regarded Egypt's political parties as factions based on differences among prominent personalities. In order to avoid divisiveness, he even called for "an end to party rivalry, and channeling of the political forces of the nation into a common front and a single phalanx."<sup>29</sup> In this way, Banna wanted to dissolve all the existing parties and to form a single party to unify the nation and lead it to independence.

Banna believed that economics was of great importance for Egypt's revival. His vision of Islamic economy contained an element of economic nationalism. He saw that the rich natural sources of Egypt were not utilized that the country suffered from foreign exploitation, unequal distribution of wealth and economic disorder. The 320 foreign companies in Egypt made a profit of seven and a half million pounds in the year 1939 alone whereas the number of Egyptian firms did not exceed eleven.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Banna demanded that foreign companies, especially those in control of public utilities, be put in the hands of Egyptians and of the Muslim countries. Thus Banna called for an economic cooperation with the Arab and the other Muslim countries.<sup>31</sup>

To give substance to his vision of economy, Ikhwan established a Spinning and Weaving Company, a Commercial and Engineering Work Company, and an Islamic Press. These companies showed the signs of success but were soon confiscated by the government when the society was dissolved in 1948.<sup>32</sup> Since these companies did not live long enough, it seems difficult to talk about the failure or success of the economic system presented by the Ikhwan although there are books on Islamic economic theory written

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<sup>28</sup> Hasan Al-Banna, "To What Do We Summon to Mankind?", *Five Tracts of Hasan al-Banna* (trans. Charles Wendel), University of California Press, Berkley 1975, p. 126.

<sup>29</sup> Hasan Al-Banna, "Toward the Light", *Five Tracts of Hasan al-Banna* (trans. Charles Wendel), University of California Press, Berkley 1975, p. 136.

<sup>30</sup> Abdin, "Political Thought", p. 62.

<sup>31</sup> Abdin, "Political Thought", p. 63.

<sup>32</sup> Abdin, "Political Thought", p. 63.

by leading members of the Ikhwan during this period.

Banna's ideas about the role of women were strictly traditional. He believed that men and women have different roles in society based on their natural and biological differences. Islam provides guide for women to fulfill their God-given natural roles. That is to say, women's place is the home, and her primary roles are mother, wife, and the housekeeper.<sup>33</sup>

Banna also believed, like many other traditional thinkers, that sexual attraction is the fundamental features of relations between men and women. In order to protect the future of society from sexual destruction, Islam prohibits social mixing between genders.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, it is not permitted to have the kind of schools or public places where women and men would come together. Both men and women have to dress modestly so that they do not attract each other.

Banna's views about the *dhimmi*,<sup>35</sup> minorities, are also traditional. He provides the minorities with the *dhimmi* status, so long as they behave with rectitude and sincerity, for the Qur'an reads: "O mankind we have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know each other." (Qur'an, 49: 13). "God forbid you to be friends only those who fought you in religion, and drove you from your homes, or aided in driving you forth." (Qur'an, 60: 9).<sup>36</sup>

Although throughout his life Banna believed that there was no separation between religion and politics, he never transferred the Ikhwan to a political party. Instead, he saw his movement as a religious and social society whose sole concern was to educate people and to remind them of their responsibilities, of their glorious past and of their present despair. In this way, he struggled for providing Muslims with a clear-cut prescription whose source was the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the prophet Muhammad until his

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<sup>33</sup> Commins, "Hasan al-Banna", p. 143.

<sup>34</sup> Commins, "Hasan al-Banna", p. 143.

<sup>35</sup> A *dhimmi* is a person with whom a covenant or bond has been made in an Islamic state. The term *dhimmi* is used here as one of several synonymous terms in the juridical context to designate a tolerated monotheist (Jew, Christian, Sabian, and Zoroastrian) who lives within an Islamic territory. A *dhimmi* pays *cizya* a kind of tax for protection of his or her life, religious or political rights and so on. He or she enjoys his or her religious rights, political freedom etc., according to covenant. However, she or he has a relatively inferior status with comparison to a Muslim.

<sup>36</sup> Banna, "Toward the Light", p. 120.

assassination in 1949.

### **The Jamaat-e-Islami (Muslim Community)**

The second most influential religious movement after the Ikhwan is the Jamaat-e-Islami (hereafter Jamaat) of Pakistan. Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Mawdudi was the founder and the first *Amir*, leader of the movement. Mawdudi's interpretation of Islam has helped contribute to the foundation of contemporary so-called Islamic revivalist thought in the Muslim world.

In South Asia, where Mawdudi's exegesis found shape, his influence has been most pronounced. As with Banna's role in the Ikhwan, Mawdudi's ideology played the central role in the history of the Jamaat. The Jamaat had also an important role in the history and politics of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Srilanka etc., over the course of the last fifty or so years.<sup>37</sup>

Mawdudi was born in 1903 at Aurangabad in Hyderabad, Deccan. He could not get a good education because he had to live the school in the tenth grade to support himself after his father's death. During the following years he worked as a correspondent and editor of several newspapers and journals. Later, he began publishing the famous *Tarjuman 'al Qur'an*, a journal which for the following forty-seven years became the most important forum of his views. Although he never attended a traditionally oriented Dar-al-'Ulum in which he might have learned Islamic Law and theology, he taught himself so well that in 1926 he was able to receive his certificate in religious training (Ijazah) and became one of the '*Ulama*. In 1941 he founded the Jamaat, and from there on his story and that of his organization have been the same.

Earlier Mawdudi was not interested in religious issues, but purely political ones. His passion then was Indian nationalism. He supported the Congress Party, for instance, and wrote in praise of the leaders of this party such as Gandhi, and Malaviya.<sup>38</sup> Later he began to write on issues of concern to Muslims, the plight of Turkey in the face of European imperialism, and the

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<sup>37</sup> For the impact of Mawdudi's thought on Islamic movements see John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?*, Oxford University Press, New York 1992, pp. 152-155; Abdel Azim Ramadan, "Fundamentalist Influence in Egypt: The Strategies of Muslim Brotherhood and the Takfir Groups", *Fundamentalism and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militancy* (ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby), University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1993, pp. 156-161.

<sup>38</sup> Charles J. Adams, "The Ideology of Mawlana Mawdudi", *South Asian Politics and Religion* (ed. Donal E. Smith), Princeton University Press, Princeton 1996, p. 373.



glories of Muslim role in India. Although his tone became increasingly communalist and overtly political, the revival of Islam was not as yet a central focus of his writings.

Mawdudi supported the Khilafet Movement, whose aim was to reestablish caliphate. With the collapse of this movement in 1924, when the caliphate was demolished in Turkey, Mawdudi's life took a major turn. The former Indian nationalist became cynical about nationalism, which he now believed had misguided Turks and Egyptians, leading them to undermine Muslim unity by rejecting the Ottoman Empire and Muslim caliphate. He also lost faith in Indian nationalism, believing that the Congress party was merely parading Hindi interests under the guise of nationalistic sentiments.<sup>39</sup> Thus, Mawdudi's approach became clearly communalist, revealing a dislike for the nationalist movement and its Muslim allies.

Like Banna, Mawdudi was greatly dismayed at what he was witnessing in his homeland in particular, but in the Muslim world in general. He sought to find a reason for the decline of Muslim power. He concluded that the cause was to be found in the corruption of Islam by the centuries of incorporation of local customs. Therefore, the salvation of Muslim culture and the preservation of its power lay in returning to "pristine" Islam whose sources were the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad.

### **The Ideology of the Jamaat**

During these years of political activity, Modula continued to write, producing a long list of articles, commentaries, short tracts and books. Although a self-taught scholar, his works have been influential even in traditional religious scholarship in South Asia as well as in many parts of the Muslim world. For instance, his translation of and commentary of the Qur'an, *Tefhim' l Qur'an* (Understanding of the Qur'an), has become one of the most widely read sources of its kind in Urdu as well as in other languages.

In his works Mawdudi elaborated his views on Islam- theology, law, philosophy and mysticism- and on society, economy and politics. He advocated an interpretative reading of Islam, one that aims to mobilize piety

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<sup>39</sup> Adams, "The Ideology of Mawlana Mawdudi", p. 373.

and faith for the purpose of political action.<sup>40</sup>

Mawdudi's reading of Islam began with a radical exegesis. His vision was chilistic and dialectic in that it saw the battle between Islam and *Kufr* (un-Islam)- the West as well as the traditional Muslim culture of India- as the central force in the historical progression of Muslim societies.

The struggle between Islam and *Kufr*, argued Mawdudi, would culminate in an Islamic revolution and the creation of an Islamic state. This would in turn initiate large-scale reforms in society, thereby leading to a Utopian Islamic Order.<sup>41</sup> It is clear from Mawdudi's reading of Islam that, unlike Ayatollah Khomeini, he was not primarily concerned with charting the path to power, rather with the shape of the Islamic state. This state at its foundations was based on the *Shari'a* (the Holly Law). He believed that the Islamic State was necessitated by its viability and superiority, and not only by religious sections. According to him, Muslims would eagerly opt for an Islamic state once they have learned of Islam's true teachings and the viability and inherent superiority of the Islamic State.

In defining the shape of the Islamic State Mawdudi borrowed widely and indiscriminately from the West. For instance, the Islamic state would be run by a modern machinery of government: an elected president (Imam), a parliament and an omnipotent judiciary.

Shaping an Islamic state was not the most difficult objective. The State would have to be successful too, for the president, and (Imam) is the shadow of Allah on earth. The success of the Islamic State would depend on its legitimacy in the eyes of society. It was for this reason that Mawdudi, unlike many other Muslim thinkers who succeeded him, favored Islamization of society before the creation of the state. Again, it was this reason, like Banna, Mawdudi placed a great deal of emphasis on education, and regarded an Islamic revolution as a piecemeal effort. If the state were Islamized before society, then the state would be compelled to resort to autocracy to impose its will on an unwilling and unprepared population. It follows then that Mawdudi viewed the Islamic state as a theo-democracy not because it would accommodate and incorporate diverse social interests, but because in such an Islamic state there would be no divisive sociopolitical issues.

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<sup>40</sup> Charles J. Adams, "Mawdudi and the Islamic State", *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (ed. John L. Esposito), Oxford University Press, New York 1983, pp. 99-133.

<sup>41</sup> Sayyid Abu'l Ala al-Modula, *Islamic Law and Constitution* (ed. Kurshid Ahmad), Jamaat-e-Islami Publications, Karachi 1995, p. 125.

Mawdudi went even further in this regard, suggesting that the *hudud* punishments (punishments for deeds proscribed in Islamic Law) could be implemented only if a society was thoroughly Islamized, for in this way the population would be aware of the teachings of Islam and would have no excuse for not following the *Shari'a*. This is/was a controversial argument which clearly parted ways with general Ziaul Haqq and certainly with Khomeini's implementation of these punishments in as yet unislamized societies like Pakistan and Iran.

With the agenda for the Islamic State in mind, Mawdudi advocated a view of Islam that mobilizes the faith according to the needs of political action. Despite the radicalism of his vision and his polemic on the Islamic state throughout his career, Mawdudi continued to believe that social change results not from violent toppling of the existing order by mobilizing the masses, but by taking over the centers of political power effecting large reforms from top down.<sup>42</sup> In Mawdudi's conception, Islamic revolution was to unfold within the existing state structures rather than with the aim of overthrowing them.<sup>43</sup> He discouraged the use of violence<sup>44</sup> in promoting the cause of Islam and defined the ideal Islamic State as not a democracy, "for democracy permits the laws to be changed by a mere majority. Majorities have known to make foolish decisions, but as a 'theo-democracy' or a 'democratic caliphate.'"<sup>45</sup> Moreover, education rather than revolutionary action constituted the heart of his approach to Islamic activism. In this regard Mawdudi's position, as manifested in the Jumaat's politics, stands in contrast to Khomeini's example, and has provided Islamic revivalism with an alternative paradigm for social action.

In defining the shape and character of the Islamic state, Mawdudi addressed such areas of concern as women's rights, the rights of minorities, and the conduct of economic matters. He dwelt less on socioeconomic problems such as population growth, economic inequalities and social justice. He believed that these issues were not real issues of concern, for they were symptoms of the absence of an Islamic order and reflections of the failure of Western ideologies. They would disappear in his utopian Islamic

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<sup>42</sup> Adams, "Ideology of Mawdudi", p. 389.

<sup>43</sup> Adams, "Ideology of Mawdudi", p. 390.

<sup>44</sup> Adams, "Ideology of Mawdudi", p. 377.

<sup>45</sup> Leonard Binder, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1963, p. 91.

order once it was implemented.<sup>46</sup>

Mawdudi's teachings on economics were politically conservative and amounted to enumeration of the assorted teaching of the *Shari'a* on social transactions. Mawdudi never sought to develop a science of economics based on the Islamic worldview. Rather, as with other issues, he viewed Islamic economics as primarily the implementation of the Islamic laws on such issues as usury, inheritance and the rights of labor.

Mawdudi also dealt with the role of women and minorities in the Islamic State. However, he did not try to put them in the contemporary context, for he argued that Islamic law was clear on these issues. As a result the Islamic state did not have to devise a way of accommodating them, but merely to implement what the *Shari'a* has enjoined. The question of minorities, he argued, was covered by the discussion of the *dhimmi*s (non-Muslim minorities) in Islamic law, and that of women by various strictures which decide the modesty of dress and the rights of women in an Islamic society.<sup>47</sup>

Mawdudi's ideas are the weakest here, and in fact lose their underlying logic. Moreover he comes to close characterising women as an insidious force whose activities ought to be regulated. Mawdudi's views on women, more than any other aspect of his thought, reveal the influence deep-seated conservative cultural attitudes. Regarding his views on the rights of minorities, he remained unapologetic. He argued that Islamic State was an ideological one, and the preservation of its ideological purity was therefore the condition for its survival and development. Extended rights for minorities would undermine the Islamic State, as they would diffuse its ideological vigilance. For this reason, although *dhimmi*s may act as civil servants of the state, they may not propagate their religious ideals among the Muslims, nor may they exercise any real political power,<sup>48</sup> for none of the purposes of religion can be accomplished so long as control affairs is in the hands of *Kafirs* (infidels). Therefore, limiting the rights of minorities to those of *dhimmi*s in Islamic law was a matter of national security and self-

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<sup>46</sup> Sayyid Abu'l Ala Modula, *Economic System of Islam* (ed. Kurshid Ahmad-trans. Rifat Hussain), Islamic Publications, Lahore 1984, pp. 178-180.

<sup>47</sup> Sayyid Abu'l Ala Modula, *Purdah, and the Status of Women in Islam*, Islamic Publications, Lahore 1972, p. 178.

<sup>48</sup> Binder, *Religion and Politics*, p. 92; Adams, "Ideology of Mawdudi", p. 392.

preservation.<sup>49</sup>

All this said, unlike many of his successors, Mawdudi did not view the issues of women and of minorities as central to his discussion of the Islamic State. For him, they were issues of secondary importance with which he was never occupied. Rather, he held that they would cease to be bones of contention in a utopian Islamic state.

### **Evaluation**

Under the leadership of the supreme guide, Hasan al-Banna and Mawlana Mawdudi, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jamaat-e-Islami tried to reinterpret Islamic history and tradition to respond to the socio-historical conditions of the twentieth century. Both regarded Islam as the all-embracing ideology with the following cliché: "The Shari'a is a complete scheme of life an all embracing social order." There is no need to go outside Islam's way of life, no need to be dependent upon the West and run the danger of a Westernized Islam.

As they looked at their societies and the Muslim world in general, both Banna and Mawdudi attributed the impotence of their communities to political divisiveness, moral laxity, and indifference to religion. Western secularism with its separation of state and church, and materialism of capitalism and Marxism were regarded as the source of decline. In contrast, they argued, Islam's organic relationship among religion, politics, and society distinguished it from the West. Withdrawal of religion, divine guidance, from public domain would be the basis for its moral decline and its ultimate downfall. As a result, Western culture as well as current Muslim world exists, as did pre-Islamic society, in a state of ignorance (Jahiliyyah). Therefore, they both convinced themselves and their followers that once an Islamic state, whose foundations would depend upon the Shari'a, was established, all the sociopolitical as well as psychological problems would be resolved. In other words, they present Islam as a definite prescription for all kinds of illnesses.

Of course there are both negative and positive consequences of this kind of presentation of Islam. First of all, these activists have undoubtedly served as a corrective not only for several types of excesses in classical modernism

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<sup>49</sup> Sayyid Abu'l Ala Mawdudi, *Human Rights in Islam* (trans. Kurshid Ahmad and Said Khan), The Islamic Foundation, Leicestershire 1972, p. 54.

but, above all, for secularist trends that would otherwise have spread much faster in Muslim societies.<sup>50</sup>

Secondly, they helped reorient the modern-educated lay Muslims emotionally toward Islam. When their countries were subjugated physically, intellectually and culturally, these young people found themselves in the middle of an identity crisis. They did not know who they were, for on the one hand there came West with all its intellectual and technological miracles, on the other hand these miracles were regarded as the means of eradicating their own culture and national identity. The leaders of these movements spoke to the emotional faculties of these young people, and reminded them of their glorious history and of the civilizations that their ancestors had created. In this way these young people were convinced that the only way out of this identity crisis was to turn to their own culture by putting themselves in the service of these movements.

Thirdly, the organization and activism of these movements contrasted, in some cases, with the tendency of modernism to consist of a loose circle of intellectuals. Their emphasis on discipline, loyalty, as well as social activities, programs resulted relatively in more cohesive and effective organisations.

On the other hand, there were negative consequences as well. According to Professor Rahman, the greatest weakness of these movements, and the greatest disservice they had done to Islam, is an almost total lack of positive effective Islamic thinking and scholarship within their ranks.<sup>51</sup> Although they insisted that Muslims should go back to the original and definitive sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, and become familiar with them, they neither had nor bothered to seek a methodology of Qur'anic interpretation that would be sound in scholarship, rationally reliable, and faithful to Qur'an itself. They also failed to develop any educational institutions of their own in the Islamic field. As a result none of Mawdudi's or Banna's sincere followers became serious students of Islam, the result being that, for the faithful, their statements represented the last word in Islam.

The other is a lamentable lack of a realistic interest and awareness of the actual problems of the modern state or its society, let alone solutions to them.

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<sup>50</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1982, p. 137.

<sup>51</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 137.

As I have tried to indicate earlier, these activists dealt with matters social and political issue-by-issue, not as a social or political philosophy. They held, for instance, that democracy is acceptable to Islam, but concepts like human rights and social justice, population growth, minority issues are not much discussed; egalitarianism is emphasized, but its nature and limits do not come up as problems. Again they proclaimed that Islam has given women their rights, but why and what kinds of rights and by what rationale are not clear. As a result, these movements attracted many educated, intelligent and energetic young lay people. Thus, in many cases, the well-meaning young enthusiast of Islam became so dependant on the ideas of their leaders that they could not even imagine the possibility of existing any other mode of thinking. Put simply, these young people became like prisoners of one or two men's ideas within a given group.

The struggle to produce viable "Islamic responses" to the new demands of modern and post modern times, however one names the present, still continues to preoccupy the minds of the Muslims in the early period of the twenty first century. Although every serious scholar of Islam acknowledges that the basic sources of Islam are the Qur'an and the Sunnah, they nonetheless does not, ideally, look to the Qur'an and the Sunnah for ready answers to the problems of life, disregarding the variables of time, culture, and place, as many so-called revivalist movements do. If the Qur'an does not give ready answers to the problems of life, being the basic source of Islam, how should Muslims read and study it and find answers to their existential problems if they think that that is what the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet are for? What is the place of history, tradition, and change in interpreting the sacred Scriptures? This leads us to the basic issue of method/usul and hermeneutics to which Muslim scholars have hardly paid any serious attention since the end of the classical period of Islam.

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