

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 rationally in the eighties and when he produced a number of Islamic books addressing various Islamic issues such as (Islam and Sensibility) 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.

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