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The Egyptian Revolution
Nasserism and Islam

Guenter Lewy
Department of Government
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

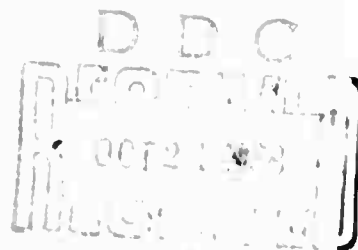
Religion and Revolution
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1. Introduction: The Political Tradition of Islam

Mohammed had organized his followers in a political community which has been called variously a theocracy or nomocracy. It was a commonwealth at once religious and political in which God and his revealed law were the supreme authority and where Mohammed, his apostle, was the Lord's vice-regent on earth. The prophet's political power was derived from his religious mission; the primary purpose of government was the promotion and protection of the new religious faith. Even more than in other societies of the ancient Middle East, the Islamic community at Medina therefore knew no distinction between the temporal and the spiritual, between church and state. There existed no separation between man's obligations as a believer and his duties as a citizen. The temporal and the spiritual power were one and the same. The Islamic state was governed by God's law revealed to Mohammed, his deputy. The latter functioned both as religious prophet and temporal head of the community. Mohammed had founded what one observer has called a "theocratical laique."

The Prophet died in 632 A.D. without designating a successor and the Koran was similarly silent on the question of how to appoint a new ruler. It is likely that Mohammed refrained from choosing a successor because he recognized the strength of Arab tribal tradition according to which the members of the tribe themselves elected a chieftain primarily on the basis of his qualities as a leader and his ability to inspire personal loyalty among his followers. In line with this principle, an assembly of Medinans elected Abu Bakr, Mohammed's faithful friend, as their new leader, and he was called the successor (caliph) of the Prophet. Abu Bakr's political power was as complete as that of Mohammed though he did not claim to be a divinely inspired prophet. The first caliph nominated his successor, Omar, and this nomination was accepted and confirmed by the community of Medina. The third and fourth caliphs, were also elected; however violence now played a considerable role in the succession. Of the four caliphs following Mohammed, only the first died a natural death, the other three were murdered in office.

A somewhat greater measure of stability was reached with the fifth caliph, Mu'awiyah, who four years before his death nominated his son as his successor, thus founding a dynasty (the Umayyads) and formally introducing the hereditary principle. This precedent was followed for the next 400 years. By the time the Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad replaced the Umayyads in the year 750, hereditary autocratic rule had become firmly established, a practice leaning

heavily upon the ancient Persian concept of kingship by divine right. "The prince, isolated from the uniform herd of his subjects, consecrated by divine designation for his office, legitimized by his descent from a long line of kings, guarded by an elaborate etiquette.... this type of despot," notes von Grunebaum, "now merged successfully with the theocratic representative of Allah and much less successfully, with the Arab chieftain of olden days."² Whereas early tradition had considered the caliphate as an elective office, with precedent pointing to a minimum of five electors, the number of electors was eventually reduced to one, a change which amounted to an implicit acceptance of the hereditary principle with the predecessor appointing his successor. The myth of election continued to live alongside, drawing strength from the oath of allegiance paid to the new prince in the capital and throughout the growing Islamic empire.

Islamic constitutional doctrine developed gradually as a rationalization of practice followed during the first two centuries of Islam. "The theory as embodied in the works of Mohammedan theologians and jurists was elaborated in order to suit already operating facts."³ According to this theory, the ultimate source of political authority was God who had provided for a ruler (iman leader or caliph) to be obeyed by the people in order to insure peace and protect the faith. It was God who established princes and deprived them of power as he saw fit, though the representatives of the community chose the caliph, acting, as it were, in God's name. The candidate for the Caliphate had to be of legal age, a freeman of the masculine sex, in the full possession of his physical and mental faculties, knowledgeable in the divine law as well as in the art of war, and, last but not least, a descendant of the Quraysh, the tribe to which the Prophet had belonged. The functions of the caliph were to govern the Muslim community as the successor of the Prophet and to protect and enforce the holy law. By accepting his office the caliph promised to exercise his powers within the limits of the law and he confirmed this promise in a contract--bay'a--with the representatives of the community. If he violated this contract, the people were absolved of allegiance and could elect another ruler.

This was the theory as it evolved in its early form and for which theological sanction was found and read into the Shari'a--the Koran and the traditions. The former contained a number of injunctions to obey the messenger of God, Mohammed, and others set in authority over the community. In the case of the traditions (hadiths), the sayings and usages ascribed to Mohammed, there is considerable evidence to indicate that some of them were manipulated to suit the interests of the ruling group almost from the beginning. Inasmuch as the doctrine of the contract between ruler and ruled made no provision for removing a bad caliph short of revolution, the door was opened to those who stressed the danger of chaos that would follow from calling a ruler to account and who insisted on practically unquestioning obedience. This dread of anarchy was reinforced by the political instability which was real enough. Disorder was fed by the uneasy coexistence of many different ethnic

and cultural groups in the same empire, by the continuing strength shown by tribal kinship groups undermining the loyalty exacted by the central government, and by the existence of many sons in the polygamous families of the ruling dynasty encouraging rivalries and intrigues. In such a situation, characterized by frequent assassinations and palace revolution, many scholars serving the caliphs emphasized the need for submissiveness to the powers that be. Endeavoring to give this teaching theological grounding and to work it into the mainstream of Islamic law, they produced sayings of the Prophet in defense of their tenets, "and as time went on these became more and more categorical and detailed." The tradition, Sir Hamilton Gibb concludes, "was being invaded by forgeries on a vast scale, sometimes by editing and supplementing genuine old traditions, more often by simple inventions." Ignaz Goldziher, the most outstanding critical student of the Hadith, does not hesitate to speak of "pious fraud."

The majority of the traditions relating to political conduct had the basic aim of buttressing an uncompromising doctrine of civic obedience. A few examples are indicated--many of them bear a striking resemblance to the teachings of early Christianity which similarly aimed at shoring up civic order and stability: "The Apostle of God said: Whoso obeys me, obeys God, and whoso rebels against me, rebels against God; whoso obeys the ruler, obeys me; and whoso rebels against the ruler, rebels against me." All earthly authority was seen as being of divine appointment, with a tyrant functioning as God's punishment for man's sin: "The Prophet said: 'do not abuse those who rule. If they act uprightly, they shall have their reward, and your duty is to show gratitude. If they do evil, they shall bear the burden, and your duty is to endure patiently. They are a chastisement which God inflicts upon those who he will; therefore accept the chastisement of God, not with indignation and wrath, but with humility and meekness.'" The occasional tradition affirming the right and duty of Muslims to disobey and rebel against a ruler violating God's law was thus effectively checked by the introduction of those far more numerous sayings which branded the creation of disorder without adequate justification as a mortal sin. Reform movements and rebellions insisting on the religious orthodoxy of the ruling dynasty were suppressed--a subject to which we will return.

The prestige and power of the early Abbasid caliphs was great. But the enormous Arab empire which the first caliphs had built, did not last. Spain broke away under an independent ruler in 756. By the year 909, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Syria in effect had become separate states, some claiming their own caliphate. The orthodox theory had finally to be abandoned when in the middle of the tenth century the caliph of Baghdad became a prisoner and pensioner of a military clique. Effective power was now wielded by the sultan, a military chieftain, whom the caliph was forced to invest with a show of legitimacy. The caliph still performed certain ceremonial functions but essentially he had become a figurehead. A de facto separation between church and state had come about and the jurists once again adjusted the theory to the new reality.

Abandoning any attempt to defend and maintain the dignity of the caliph, the religious teachers (ulama) and jurists now taught that anyone in effective possession of political power had to be obeyed, no matter how irregular his assumption of power or impious and barbarous his conduct. The Islamic community, no longer tied to any particular constitutional scheme, was held to be intact as long as the secular government formally recognized the Shari'a, consulted the ulama, and conditions existed enabling individual Muslims to obey the holy law. The sultan's power was legitimized by the legal fiction of deriving his authority from that of the caliph; the new practice and the teaching of the theologians and jurists defending it were declared to be binding since the community accepted it. The saying credited to Mohammed, "my community will never agree upon an error" reinforced the hold of precedent. "Where the legists were forced to succumb to facts," notes a student of the sociology of Islam, "they called in aid the doctrine that ijma', the agreement, actually the acquiescence of the community, justifies whatever happens in Islam."⁹

The fact that Islamic constitutional practice and theory had traveled a long way was frankly acknowledged by al-Ghazali (1064-1111), a scholar often acclaimed as the greatest Muslim after Mohammed. In his eyes the circumstances of the time required the acceptance of the ignominious position of the caliph and of the fact that government now was a consequence solely of military power:

The concessions made by us are not spontaneous, but necessity makes lawful what is forbidden. We know it is not allowed to feed on a dead animal: still, it would be worse to die of hunger. Of those that contend that the caliphate is dead forever and irreplaceable, we should like to ask: what is to be preferred, anarchy and the stoppage of social life for lack of a properly constituted authority, or acknowledgement of the existing order, whatever it be? Of these two alternatives, the jurist cannot but choose the latter.¹⁰

Actual power was in the hands of the sultan, al-Ghazali admitted, though the validity of his government depended upon the sultan's oath of allegiance to the caliph. However, since al-Ghazali accepted the practice of the day according to which the caliph was appointed by the sultan, the function of the caliph was clearly reduced to being that of a symbol of unity, divine guidance and historical continuity.¹¹

Eventually the fiction of the sultan's delegated authority became so apparent, that it was abandoned altogether. The legitimacy of the sultan was divorced from that of the caliph, success in assuming and maintaining the rulership being the only criteria. The Egyptian judge Ibn Jama'ah (1241-1332) realistically described this state of affairs:

The sovereign has a right to govern until another and stronger one shall oust him from power and rule in his

State. The latter will rule by the ~~same~~ title and will have to be acknowledged on the same grounds; for a government, however objectionable, is better than none at all; and between two evils we must choose the lesser.¹²

The above was written a few years after the Mongols had stormed Bagdhad in 1258 and had put the caliph to death. From that time on the institution of the caliphate was essentially extinct, a development noted by the famous 14th century Arab philosopher of history, Ibn-Khaldun. To be sure, the Mamluk rulers of Egypt for two and a half centuries kept a descendant of the last Abbasid caliphs as a puppet, and the Turks, capturing Cairo in 1517, were said to have transferred the caliphate to the Ottoman line. But while the caliphate thus lived on in name until the 20th century, its meaning had changed completely. In the late Ottoman period, the title, caliph, was increasingly assumed by sultans wanting to embellish their authority.

This, then, was the pattern of Islamic government which developed after the destruction of the Bagdhdd caliphate. Any de facto ruler declaring his fealty to the shari'a had a claim on the obedience of his Muslim subjects. The clerical class, the ulama, at times denounced the unrighteous ways of a sultan, but by and large they staunchly supported the government and warned against civil disorder. In practice as well as in theory, neither the ulama nor the individual were held to have rights as individuals or groups which could be asserted against the ruling authority. Inasmuch as Islam had not produced a separate religious establishment which could successfully challenge the state, no conflict developed between church and state as in medieval Christianity. Reinforced by the poverty of the Muslim countries and their economic and social stagnation, the dominant trend was one of unrelieved political quietism, supported and encouraged by religious arguments. No matter how evil a ruler, the subject's duty was to obey. "The civitas Dei," writes von Grunebaum, "had failed and the Muslim community had accepted its failure."¹³

* * *

The development sketched out so far is that of the general body of orthodox Muslims known as Sunnis. But alongside this main stream Islam has abounded in smaller tributaries--sects and heresies which had their own theological views as well as different conceptions of political rule. At times these sects were able to gain a hearing and eventually achieve a compromise with the majority Sunni position. In other instances, however, the challenge was sufficiently radical so as to make peaceful resolution of differences impossible. Such was the case with a movement which has been called the earliest sect of Islam, the so-called Khawarij or Kharijites (Seceders).

The early Khawarij were Bedouins who as untamed nomads resented the encroachments of the new Islamic state upon the freedoms

of their tribal society. This spirit of rebellion first burst out in open revolt during the reign of the fourth caliph, Ali. Later, disturbed over what they regarded as the irreligious and lax behavior of the Umayyad caliphs, these "Puritans of Islam" continued to spread terror among their opponents, often killing women and children as well as male Muslims who disagreed with them. The Khawarij regarded themselves as saints under moral obligation to revolt against sinful government and its supporters. God alone in their eyes was entitled to complete fealty. Applying the strict standards of the Prophet, they concluded that the Umayyad caliphs were unbelievers and therefore had to be fought.

The doctrinal teaching of the Khawarij was far from unified, with heresiologists listing as many as twenty-one subsects.¹⁴ Some of these, it appears, stressed the freedom of the human will and opposed the concept of predestination. In a manner strikingly similar to the teachings of the revolutionary Anabaptists of the 16th century,¹⁵ the Khawarij insisted that man was responsible for his own actions, that God wishes the good and not the bad, and that it was, therefore, right and necessary to kill all impious and tyrannical rulers and those following them.¹⁶ Some court theologians, in turn, did their best to counter this view by embracing the necessity of believing in fate. All acts, they said, must necessarily occur as decreed by God, and this included the cruel deeds of tyrants, whom it was wrong, therefore, to resist.¹⁷

Both the Khawarij and their opponents created their own traditions to provide doctrinal support for their respective positions. For example, the Prophet was asked, according to a tradition invoked by the Khawarij: "Your cousin Mu'awija commands us to do this and that, should we obey him? Obey him, spoke the Prophet, in obedience to God, oppose him in his opposition to God."¹⁸ Against this and similar traditions justifying resistance to irreligious rulers, court theologians invoked sayings of Mohammed praising unconditional obedience. Still, the Khawarij for a time had many followers. They benefited from the social tensions building up between the Arab aristocracy, the individualistic Bedouins, and the non-Arab converts. All upright Muslims, they taught, had the same rights in the Islamic community, whether rich or poor, freeman or slave, Arab or non-Arab. The legitimacy of their leader, the Imam, depended upon his personal merit, and if he erred his followers had the divine right to remove him.

By the end of the eighth century the Khawarij movement had been militarily crushed, though small colonies of them survive to this day in Libya, Algeria, Oman and Zanzibar. However, their fanaticism, their egalitarianism and its anarchical consequences, in the meantime had helped push their opponents to the other extreme of increasingly deprecating the right of rebellion against unjust authority. Just as St. Paul, Luther and Calvin reacted to the antinomianism of the early Christians and of the 16th century Anabaptists, respectively, by emphasizing the duty to obey the powers that be, the orthodox theologians under the Abbasids,

strengthened by the Persian tradition of divine right kingship, taught that any revolt, no matter how extreme the provocation, was the most heinous of crimes. This doctrine, writes Sir Gibb, "came to be consecrated in the juristic maxim, 'Sixty years of tyranny are better than an hour of civil strife'."19

Also benefiting from widespread social unrest during the first century of Islam was the emergence of another, far more important, Islamic sect, the Shi'a. Shi'ism began as a legitimist political movement which demanded that the caliphate be entrusted to the house of Ali, Mohammed's son-in-law and paternal first cousin. Soon, however, the Shi'ites attracted the support of the underprivileged classes, especially in the garrison cities planted by the Arabs in conquered lands. These Muslims of non-Arabic descent, writes Bernard Lewis, rallied to a form of Islam "that challenged the legitimacy of the existing Arab aristocratic state. Their aspiration was for an order in which all Muslims would be equal and Arab birth would no longer carry privileges."20

In a situation where church and state were closely interwoven, this challenge to the existing social system necessarily led to theological schism and the formation of sects. Common to many of the Shi'ite sects was the belief in a divinely illuminated leader who would lead the oppressed out of their misery--a messianic figure or Mahdi (the rightly-guided one). Practically all the Shi'ites attributed superhuman qualities to their Imam, a political and religious leader who, unlike the caliph of the orthodox Sunnis, could define and modify religious dogma and doctrine. The Imam of the Shi'a was appointed by his predecessor rather than elected; he was sinless and infallible and could not be deposed.

The most extreme of the early Shi'ite sects was one known as the Isma'ilis. Because of the secretive, quasi-masonic character of the movement, an amalgam of Shi'ite and Persian and Syrian gnostic sects, our knowledge of the movement's doctrines and activities is limited. It appears that the Isma'ilis found their main support among laborers, artisans and other depressed classes. Laws, they taught, were merely invented and enacted to hold down the masses and serve the interests of the ruling class. Those who possessed access to the secret body of the knowledge of their sect were not required to obey the law of the land. The Isma'ilis exalted rebellion against the Sunni caliphs while at the same time they enforced the strictest obedience to their own Imam, endowed with supernatural powers.

A later branch of the Isma'ilis flourishing in the tenth and eleventh centuries was the popular revolutionary movement of the Carmathians which was characterized by strongly escatological views. "The time of manifestation is near," says one of the few surviving original manifestos, from the year 1018, "the moment of the sword, the upheaval, the massacre of the impious and their forcible annihilation, is approaching rapidly."21 Another offshoot, the "Assassins",

staged frequently dramatic killings of prominent opponents in mosques and in the court, one of their most famous victims being the vizier and scholar, Nizam ul-Mulk who was assassinated in 1092. "By dying in the line of duty," writes a student of the Assassins, "they were using their bodies to purify their souls for the realms of light."²² The modern successors of the Assassins, fully pacified and respectable, are the Isma'ilis following the leadership of the Aga Khan.

The Carmathians, as noted, were especially successful among the urban artisans where they used the craft guilds to maintain their influence long after their more ambitious military challenges had been defeated. These guilds in time became the stronghold of Islamic mysticism (Sufism) which fused Christian, Shi'ite and gnostic images, and had a strong appeal to the underprivileged masses. Eventually the sufi orders became formally Sunni and relinquished much of their early revolutionary zeal. However, occasionally insurrections broke out led by guilds or sufi preachers like the great revolt of the Ottoman dervishes in the early 15th century or the guild insurrections in 17th century Istanbul.²³

Throughout the first 1100 years of its existence Islamic political life thus had its share of rebellions. An orthodox doctrine which stressed the duty of practically unconditional obedience to the powers that be was accompanied by heresies and sects which taught and practiced the duty and rightfulness of revolt against impious or oppressive authority. These two seemingly contradictory phenomena, of course, are related. Muslim political doctrine and Islamic political institutions failed to assure a peaceful resolution of differences over social and economic issues and an orderly succession, regional and tribal loyalties remained strong, and governments most of the time showed themselves incapable of inspiring the loyalty of their subjects by facing and solving the society's social problems in an equitable manner. In this situation, aggravated by geographical isolation and a poverty of resources, rebellions and military mutinies were constant and frequent occurrences. In Algiers, for example, between 1671 and 1818, fourteen of the thirty rulers achieved power ²⁴ through a military rebellion and by assassinating their predecessors. These rivalries, internal wars, assassinations and rebellions signify the failure of Islamic political institutions while at the same time they assured the survival of Islam, "Traditional Islam," notes an astute observer, "survived for more than a millenium in a harsh and uncertain environment because it was capable of converting constant tension and conflict into a force for constant political renewal and social survival."²⁵ Rebellions, many of them inspired by religious motives, acted as a safety valve which attacked and undermined political authority but also often helped to renovate it.

2. Background to Revolt

Egypt became part of the Ottoman empire in 1517 and it continued under Turkish rule until the early nineteenth century. Mohammed Ali, who assumed power in 1805 following the withdrawal of Napoleon's troops, for a time succeeded in restoring Egypt's status as a Mediterranean power. During his reign the country entered the modern world--the feudal system of land tenure was destroyed, factories, roads and schools were built and Egypt acquired a national army. But in 1882 the British occupied Egypt and it was not until 1922 that formal independence was restored. Even so, British troops remained in Egypt and foreigners continued to enjoy privileged treatment in business and in the processes of government. The British embassy retained its influence. Nationalist aspirations and the desire for constitutional government had been awakened but they were frustrated by the unholy alliance of an autocratic monarchy with the unpopular foreigner.

During the British occupation Egypt made great strides in the spheres of agriculture, finance and communications, and modernization continued during the inter-war period. World War I had spurred industrialization and in the cities the Westernization of customs and manners was accelerating. "Egypt between the wars," writes Tom Little, "was evolving socially at a rapid pace, although the evolution did not reduce the great gulf between wealth and poverty which is the principal characteristic of Egyptian society."²⁶ The large majority of the country's population still eked out a meagre living by working a narrow strip of land along the Nile. The Wafd, the political organization representing the growing nationalist ferment, was led by landowners, prosperous lawyers and businessmen. The frequent suspension of constitutional government by the king further discouraged a wider participation of the masses in the political process and benefited new groups of the mass movement variety that worked outside of the shaky parliamentary system.²⁷

The Second World War brought continued economic progress but its ramifications and aftermath also added to the strains on Egypt's social and political structure. The rapid growth of industry increased the urban population; at the height of the war effort, Allied army workshop and services employed over 200,000 Egyptians. Many of these people were now for the first time drawn into political life, which is still confined in the main to the cities and towns. But in 1945, with the end of the war and the withdrawal of most of the Allied troops, over 250,000 wage earners--more than a third of the entire working force--lost their jobs and distress and agitation mounted.²⁸ White collar workers and the lower middle class were suffering from shrinking incomes caused by an inflation that by 1945 had pushed up the cost of living to three times its level in 1937. The civil service emerged from the war swollen in numbers and demoralized by the corruption and nepotism that had flourished as routine under Wafd rule; it was impoverished and thoroughly dissatisfied with existing conditions. The same held true for the police force.²⁹

The humiliating defeat of the Egyptian army in the war of 1948 with Israel, a nation with a fifteenth of Egypt's population, alienated another crucial support of the regime--the armed forces, who felt betrayed by their civilian leaders. The troops in the field were found to be inadequately prepared and equipped with defective weapons; the scandal and profiteering that were discovered discredited the king and the politicians serving him. During the years 1950 and 1951 a series of peasant uprisings and strikes in the cities revealed the growing unrest. Terrorism by extremist religious groups increased. Cotton exports, which had risen sharply as a result of the Korean war, fell drastically in early 1952.³⁰ Real income was down to the 1913 level. On January 26, 1952 riots broke out in Cairo that were brought under control only with the help of regular troops. To a group of army officers that for some time had been conspiring against the palace the moment appeared opportune.

An organized group of so-called "Free Officers" had been in existence since late 1949 though revolutionary agitation carried out by individual officers had been going on since the beginning of World War II. Most of these men were of humble social origin and they had received no higher education other than advanced military training. They were united by hatred of the corrupt monarchy and of the British; during the Africa campaign several of them established contact with the Germans in Libya. "Egypt had been patient," recalls Anwar Sadat, one of the early conspirators. "We had suffered insult and provocation, and now we prepared to fight side by side with the Axis to hasten England's defeat."³¹ A series of mishaps shortcircuited these overly ambitious plans and it was not until after the war in Palestine that a more formal organization was created. In January 1950 an executive committee came into being which elected as its chairman a 29 year-old major named Gamal Abdul Nasser.

The organization became known as the Society of Free Officers. It carried out an extensive propaganda campaign among the armed forces as well as among students and civilian groups opposed to the status quo. Army commands were infiltrated and gradually the organization increased its membership and influence. In December 1951 the Free Officers succeeded in electing the popular General Mohammed Neguib to the presidency of the Officers Club, a much sought after post. Neguib was not a member of the conspiracy, but the victory of the Free Officers' candidate over the nominee of the king demonstrated the growing strength of the movement.

The original plans of the conspirators had provided for action to be taken in 1954 or 1955.³² But the threat of discovery combined with the tottering state of the regime made them advance the date of the uprising. Several weeks of boycott and guerilla warfare against the British in the Canal Zone, which followed Egypt's abrogation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 on October 8, 1951, had culminated in a serious clash between British troops and Egyptian auxiliary police in Ismailia on January 25, 1952 that left forty-three Egyptians dead. On the following day, mobs in Cairo attacked British firms and institutions and before the day was over large parts of central

Cairo--cinemas, social clubs and bars, department and luxury stores, automobile showrooms--had gone up in flames. The accumulated resentments had found for their target not only the British but all foreigners and the Westernized wealthy class as well. Civilian political leadership now appeared to be collapsing. During the first seven months of 1952 four cabinets succeeded each other; one remained in office for only a few hours. In this situation of general discontent and breakdown of authority the Free Officers had only one serious rival--the Muslim Brotherhood.

The political, economic and social changes that had taken place in the Middle East as a result of contact with the West and European penetration had created in Egypt the same farreaching intellectual turbulence that had engulfed the rest of the Islamic world. Confronted with the power of the West and the weakness of their own society, Muslim intellectuals like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897) and Mohammed Abduh (1849-1905) had called for a purification of beliefs and practices in order to restore Islam to its position of ancient strength. Their followers in the twentieth century had split between modernists who sought to build a Western-type democracy within the framework of a rejuvenated Islam and fundamentalists who reaffirmed the unity of the spiritual and temporal in Islam and advocated return to the theocratic foundations of the faith. This second school of thought had opposed the abolition of the caliphate by Attatürk in 1924; its most eloquent spokesman had been the Syrian-born Mohammed Rashid Rida (1865-1935) whose pupil, Hasan al-Banna, founded the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1928.

Al-Banna, born in 1906 in a small town northwest of Cairo, had grown up in a deeply religious home. His father was the local preacher and he was able to supplement his son's formal education by passing on to him his extensive traditional learning and piety. In 1923, at the age of sixteen, young Banna had completed his course at a Teacher's training school. By that time he had become involved with several religious societies and, attracted to mysticism, he had joined one of the Sufi orders. He was upset, as he recalls in his memoirs, by the defection of the educated youth from the "Islamic way of life." Even his teachers at Azhar university in Cairo, the intellectual center of Islam, were ineffectual in stemming "the missionary and atheistic currents" disrupting Islamic society. The time for action, he felt, had come.³³

In 1927 al-Banna accepted an appointment as elementary school teacher in Ismailia and several months later, in March 1928, he teamed up with six laborers to form the Society of Muslim Brothers. The name was selected by Banna. "We are brothers in the service of Islam; hence we are 'the Muslim Brothers'."³⁴ From these modest beginnings, by the end of World War II the Society had grown into one of the most important and powerful political forces in Egypt. In 1934 it had some fifty branches; in 1949 there were said to be 2000 branches with an estimated 500,000 active members. In addition, the society claimed another half million sympathizers or affiliated

members and it thus could assert to speak in the name of one million Egyptians.³⁵ The Society, writes Richard P. Mitchell, its best informed Western student, "became so diversified in membership as to be virtually representative of every group in Egyptian society. More important, in this respect, it made effective inroads into the most sought-after of these groups--the civil servants and the students--and the most neglected but potentially powerful group--the urban laborer and the rural farmer."³⁶

The striking success of the Brotherhood and its emergence as a mass organization during the course of World War II was due primarily to certain underlying factors. The heavy influx of foreign troops and the consequent spread of corruption, blackmarketeering, alcoholism and prostitution led to a profound demoralization on the part of a tradition-bound people. "For these poverty-stricken masses, under-fed, demoralized and irritated by the foreign soldier," one observer notes, "El Banna and his men brought a message of revenge and hope, vague enough to unite the most opposed groups, lyrical enough to act as a drug, faithful enough to religious teachings to look like a buoy to which the drifting mass could cling, and, finally, with enough sound egalitarianism to attract all kinds of disinherited."³⁷ At a time when the old value system was crumbling under the impact of technology and mass communications reaching ever wider circles, fundamentalism seemed to offer salvation and meaning in life by striving to resurrect an idealized past. A militant messianic radicalism glorifying passion and struggle could appeal to traditional men involved in untraditional and unresolved problems and dissatisfied with a secularized leadership.³⁸ The network of local lodges could restore the sense of belonging lost as a result of the demise of the Islamic guilds and Sufi orders.³⁹ The failure of the party system and the shabby record of the Wafd increased the attraction of the Brotherhood for students and other middle class elements seeking a political outlet for their nationalistic sentiments.

At war's end the movement published a daily newspaper, Ikhwan al-Muslimeen (The Muslim Brotherhood) and with the help of this paper as well as through an extensive program of sermons, lessons and pamphlets the Society was able to reach a wide audience. The program of the Brotherhood has always been somewhat vague but several points stand out. The Society advocated the establishment of an Islamic state which would realize the rules and injunctions of the Shari'a. The nation would have to rid itself of all foreign, non-Islamic influences. Adultery, usury, drinking and gambling were to be suppressed vigorously; marriage and procreation were to be encouraged. Individual Muslims were exhorted to maintain Islamic morals in all aspects of their domestic life and to struggle for the cause of Islam no matter how long and arduous the road to victory.⁴⁰

The Brotherhood was vague on the political form which a state based upon Islamic principles would take. The Koran they insisted, was perfectly clear and unambiguous,⁴¹ and the ruler therefore would only have to be the mouthpiece of the law. If he deviated from his

assigned task then the people could warn and ultimately remove him, though the Society did not indicate how "the people" should arrive at this decision or go about carrying it out. Presumably, the right of interpretation of doctrine was vested in Banna, the Supreme guide of the Society, to whom the members swore an oath of absolute obedience. The existence of many parties in Egypt was held to be one of the main causes of corruption and disunity; in their place a single party was to work for independence and reform.⁴² No demand was made for the immediate appointment of a Caliph--perhaps as one writer surmises, in order to prevent the movement being misled into support of an Arab monarch before Banna had had time to establish himself in power.⁴³ After achieving the liberation of Egypt the Brotherhood was to work for Arab unity and eventually the union of all Islamic countries. Narrow nationalism was called a "hideous pestilency" and "the community created by Islam must come before any that is created through blood or homeland."⁴⁴ The final goal was the conversion and unity of the entire world by means of a holy war (jihad). As a Brotherhood pamphlet issued around 1944 explained, the duty to carry on this struggle was imposed on every Muslim by his religion: "It requires us to spread the teachings of Islam over the whole earth with all means at our disposal. It is not lust for power and wealth which incites us to this task, but the love of God and the desire to let the world partake of the blessings of this religion."⁴⁵

The program of the Society called any government that neglected the commands of God unacceptable; Muslims had the duty "to fight it to the end and institute, in its place, a government that actually observes the teachings of Islam and strives to realize its ideals."⁴⁶ In achieving its goals the Brotherhood was to use education and persuasion but resort to physical force was regarded as acceptable when necessary. To this end, the Society organized a program of physical education and military training for its members. Also, in the late thirties Banna organized a secret apparatus that had the tasks of defending the movement against the police and to engage in armed struggle as circumstances dictated. From 1946 on, this special branch of the Society committed numerous acts of terrorism against the British and Egyptians deemed dangerous to the Society. Assaults on passing British cars or British establishments as well as bombings of Egyptian police posts were used as training exercises for the personnel of the secret apparatus. "'Imperialism' and 'government'," notes Mitchell, "were becoming more consciously one and the same 'enemy'."⁴⁷ Bombings of courthouses and of the residences of political leaders were followed by a series of political assassinations that claimed the lives of a district judge, said to have been hard on the Society, and of the Cairo chief of police. In December 1948 the government finally moved against the Brotherhood, ordered its dissolution and arrested most of the leaders. A few days later, police minister Nuqrashi was shot down and killed by a 23 year old assassin, a medical student who had been a member of the Society since 1944. On February 12, 1949 Hasan al-Banna was murdered by the political police acting on orders, or at least with the connivance, of the head of the government.⁴⁸

The death of the Supreme Guide had a debilitating effect on the movement. Banna had been a very powerful speaker and writer who had inspired his followers by his eloquence, sincerity and utter dedication to the cause. The Society had consciously encouraged a "cult of personality" and the loss of the charismatic Banna was a severe blow. Disputes about the choice of a successor continued for over a year; it was not before October 1951 that the name of the new leader was officially announced. He was Hasan al-Hodeiby, a judge and a rather colorless person in comparison with the founder of the Brotherhood. The Society meanwhile had been allowed to return to legal status and Hodeiby did his best to disassociate the movement from the earlier tactics of violence. This alienated the members of the secret apparatus who considered themselves the elite of the Society. Hodeiby's difficulties in establishing himself as the new Supreme Guide were compounded by his inability to achieve in the conduct of the office the "personal" approach of his predecessor.⁴⁹

Hodeiby's control over the Brotherhood thus was far from complete and the secret apparatus, in particular, was beyond his reach. It was here that contacts existed with the Free Officers. In the guerilla campaign against the British in the Canal Zone in late 1951, the Muslim Brothers played a prominent role and many of them were supplied and trained by officers in the Nasser group. Liaison between the Brotherhood and discontents in the Army had been made as early as 1940 through Anwar al-Sadat.⁵⁰ During the Palestine war the Brothers by their valor had gained the respect of the conspirators and the Free Officers had come to regard the Society as a useful ally. Still, Nasser had resisted the idea of a merger suggested by Banna and cooperation between the two movements was often marred by "clashes and misunderstandings."⁵¹ Both Hodeiby, the Supreme Guide, and the Free Officers opposed the mob violence in Cairo on "Black Saturday", January 26, 1952, though individual members of the Brotherhood took a prominent part in the disorders. In a public statement Hodeiby repudiated the fire and those who favored such tactics.⁵² The conspirators around Nasser, taking advantage of the revolutionary situation and the weakness of the regime, now began concrete preparations for an uprising. On July 23, 1952, the Free Officers seized power in a practically bloodless coup.

3. The Break with the Muslim Brotherhood

The successful rising of the Free Officers at first appeared to be no more than another shuffle of portfolios. The casualty list amounted to two men killed and seven wounded; the amiable General Neguib, not a conspirator himself, was made president of the military junta. Anwar Sadat, broadcasting the seizure of power by the army in the name of Neguib on the following morning, warned against violence and assured foreigners that the army would protect their persons and their property.⁵³ The king was told to dismiss the government and to appoint a new civilian premier, Ali Maher. But the surface calm was deceptive. On July 26, three days after the coup, King Farouk was asked to resign in favor of his infant son. He obliged without resistance and sailed into exile on board the royal yacht the same day. Formally Egypt remained a monarchy under a Council of Regency for another eleven months but effective power was wielded by the council of officers.

The average age of the members of the officers' group was thirty-three years. Their political views ranged from extreme right-wing sentiments and identification with the views of the Brotherhood to radical socialism and communism. None had previously held any kind of governmental office. Their aims were vague and undefined; there was no doctrine and no program but only a vision of a better future for Egypt. "We decided to proceed, nevertheless," Nasser reminisced a decade later. "We would study, in the meantime, we would diligently try to learn... But we would also act."⁵⁴

For a short time the officers attempted to work through the existing political parties but this mode of governing was soon abandoned. The Constitution of 1923, still nominally in force, was abolished; the parties were dissolved and their funds confiscated. In February 1953 a "Provisional Constitution" was announced which placed all power into the hands of the committee of thirteen officers, henceforth known as the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). The titles of "bey" and "pasha" were abolished, a land reform decree was issued. On June 18, 1953 the government proclaimed the end of the monarchy; the coup had turned into a revolution.

General Neguib was made President and Prime Minister, Nasser was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior. But less than a year later Neguib had been stripped of all power and Nasser had assumed the key post. Neguib, not realizing that the officers who had made the revolution were in no mood to abdicate in favor of the old politicians, sought the normalization of political life through the election of a new parliament, the end of censorship and the freeing of political prisoners. In the contest for power that ensued Nasser proved the superior tactician. When a first attempt to oust the popular Neguib ran into too much opposition Nasser shrewdly yielded to Neguib's

plea to restore parliamentary government and proclaimed the abdication of the RCC. Neguib was now cast in the role of the man who was trying to wreck the revolution; within a month Nasser had built up enough support from among the army, police and workers syndicates to be able to force out Neguib for good. On April 17, 1954 Nasser became Prime Minister and the military dictatorship was consolidated once more. Neguib remained President for a few more months but his effective career had ended.⁵⁵

The downfall of Neguib coincided with the suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood which had supported Neguib in his unsuccessful struggle with Nasser and the RCC. Relations with the Brotherhood had deteriorated steadily since the Free Officers' seizure of power. On July 23, 1952, the Society had cooperated with the army conspirators by guarding foreign embassies and places of business against mob attacks. They also had agreed to organize demonstrations in favor of the new regime and to harass and obstruct any British intervention from the Canal Zone. Even though most of this offer of help did not have to be invoked, the Brotherhood took credit for the smooth working of the uprising and came to regard the events of July 23 as "our revolution."⁵⁶ The connections between several of the officers and the Society were well known.

The Supreme Guide was invited to meet the officers who had assumed power but he kept them waiting for four days. In a meeting with Nasser Hodeiby demanded that any decree of the new regime be submitted to him for approval. Nasser replied that the Revolution would not submit to anybody's tutorship.⁵⁷ Another source of annoyance to the junta were the repeated pronouncements of the Brotherhood on the need to establish an Islamic government based upon the teachings of the Koran. To the Free Officers these demands represented a reactionary program. While sympathetic to the desire of the Society to apply the teachings of Mohammed to modern life, Neguib later recalled, the officers "were convinced that to do so blindly would spell disaster. The rebirth of Egypt, in our opinion, depended on the continued modernization of its social, political, and economic institutions."⁵⁸ The officers wanted a secular republic rather than a theocratic state dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood.

The military junta was aware of the strength of the Islamic ethos and the popularity of the Society among the masses and the handling of the Brotherhood therefore demanded care and caution. Colonel Rashad Muhanna, an officer very close to the Society, was appointed to the Council of Regents for the infant monarch. When Neguib formed his first cabinet in September 1952, Hasan al-Baquri, a member of the Brotherhood and an old class-mate of Nasser, was offered and accepted the post of Minister of Waqf (Religious and Charitable Properties). The Supreme Guide, it appears, was asked to make two additional nominations, but when Hodeiby's nominees were turned down by the junta, the Society decided to refuse to enter the government; Baquri, who failed to resign, was expelled.⁵⁹ The first open break between the military regime and the Brotherhood had developed.

On October 14, 1952, about one month later, Colonel Muhanna was removed from the Regency Council. The dismissal of the popular Brotherhood sympathizer, it was announced, had become necessary because of Muhanna's opposition to the agrarian reform program and his attempt to gain undue personal influence. Muhanna had repeatedly criticized the existing "godless" government and he had pressed for the promulgation of an Islamic constitution.⁶⁰ The removal of Muhanna strengthened the conviction of many leading brethren that the new regime, and especially Nasser, were not to be trusted in relation to Egypt's religious destiny. The arrest of Muhanna in January 1953 and his subsequent trial and sentencing to life-imprisonment for counterrevolutionary activity further strained relations.

When the regime ordered the dissolution of all political parties in January 1953, the Brotherhood was allowed to continue as a religious association. Sensing its position of strength, the Society once again asked for a veto over all new laws, and Nasser for the second time turned down this demand. "This event," the government later noted, "was the turning point in the Brotherhood's position vis-a-vis the Revolution."⁶¹ The formation of the Liberation Rally on January 23, 1953 further widened the gulf, for the Brotherhood, not without justification, regarded this move as an attempt by the regime to create a new popular base for the Revolution that could rival the Society.⁶²

Publicly the appearance of cooperation was maintained. On February 13, 1953, the fourth anniversary of the death of Banna, Neguib and Nasser and other leading members of the government participated in the annual pilgrimage to the tomb of "the martyr of the nation."⁶³ But in April, in a move clearly designed to dissociate the regime from the Brotherhood, the government launched a campaign to unify the nation with the new slogan "Religion is for God and the nation is for all." The proclamation of the republic in June 1953 also irritated the Society; at the first annual celebration of the victory of the Revolution the Brothers were conspicuously absent from the center of the proceedings.⁶⁴ The military leaders, in turn, were angered by contacts between the Supreme Guide and the British Embassy in April 1953.⁶⁵ The fact that the British had sought out Hodeiby in order to ascertain his position on the forthcoming negotiations for the evacuation of the British forces from Egypt was an indication of the power attributed to the Brotherhood, and it represented a clear challenge to the government's claim to be representing and leading the country. Matters were made worse when the Supreme Guide a month later turned a cold shoulder to an inquiry from the junta concerning the readiness of the Society's forces for a struggle with the British. The interests of Islam, Hodeiby insisted, did not necessarily coincide with the interests of Egypt.⁶⁶

The leaders of the Brotherhood were not in agreement on the tactics to be pursued. Hodeiby, it will be recalled had run into

opposition from radical elements in the Society from the very beginning of his term of office, and the government did its best to exploit the split. In November 1953 the Society experienced an internal coup, but Hodeiby was able to reassert his authority and the Society closed ranks behind him.⁶⁷ From now on it was only a matter of time until relations between the government and the Brotherhood would break up completely. The Society was organizing cells in the armed forces and the police; warnings to desist from this course were not heeded.⁶⁸ The moment of an open clash was approaching.

The pretext for proceeding against the Brotherhood presented itself in January 1954. At a student meeting at the University of Cairo, Brotherhood speakers attacked Nasser as a dictator and accused him of being an Anglo-American pawn. The meeting ended in a violent clash with students belonging to the National Liberation Rally and a police jeep was set afire.⁶⁹ On the following day the cabinet decided to outlaw the Society; 450 Brothers, including the Supreme Guide, were arrested. A lengthy statement explaining the action reviewed the uneasy relations between the revolutionary regime and the Brotherhood and concluded with a finding that the organization was a political party subject to the law dissolving all political parties. The communique ended:

The Revolution will not permit that a reactionary drama should be repeated in Egypt in the name of religion, and will not permit anyone to play with the fate of this country in order to satisfy private passions under whatever pretext; it will not permit the exploitation of religion in the service of vested interests and lusts. The measures of the Revolution will be resolute and in the full light of the day, in front of all the Egyptians. So help us God.⁷⁰

During the Neguib crisis in February 1954 members of the Society organized demonstrations in support of the General who had become the rallying point of all those seeking to bring down the military dictatorship. When Nasser agreed to abrogate the decree abolishing the political parties the Brotherhood, too, was allowed to resume activities and Hodeiby and most of the other prisoners were released. Nasser's comeback a month later led to renewed dissolution of all political parties, but the Society, promising to cooperate with the regime, was allowed to continue its activities. Still, the old tensions were far from resolved. "While official peace had been declared between the government and the Society," writes Mitchell, "the instruments were being secretly forged for what was now regarded on both sides as an inevitable war to the end."⁷¹

The resumption of negotiations with the British for a final settlement of the Suez Canal dispute put the Brotherhood into open opposition to Nasser. Clandestinely distributed pamphlets denounced the regime not only for suppression of political

freedom but also for preparing to betray the national cause by negotiating rather than fighting the foreign usurper of Egyptian soil. On August 2, 1954, after the signing of the draft agreement with Britain that provided for the evacuation of British troops from the Canal zone within twenty months but conceded their right to return in the event of war in the area, Hodeiby addressed an open letter to Nasser that demanded the renunciation of the "treasonable agreement" and challenged Nasser to publish the Brotherhood's case. Nasser, speaking to a meeting of the Liberation Rally, replied forcefully: the Brethren in their secret contacts with the British in 1953 had been willing to accept a far worse agreement. They "oppose this regime and all its achievements and they say that Islam is their objective. No, their objective is power. Religion to them is but a means to power."⁷² The pamphlet warfare intensified; a limited cooperation between the Brotherhood and the communists developed at the same time.

The government responded to this stepped up opposition by a massive press campaign that sought to discredit Hodeiby and "his gang." Most of these attacks were directed against Hodeiby and his immediate followers rather than against the Brotherhood as such and singled out especially their deviation from the principles of Islam.⁷³ Sensing the continued popularity of the Society's espousal of the cause of Islam and seeking to enlist the religious appeal of the movement in order to strengthen its own legitimacy, the regime now began a concerted effort to establish its Islamic credentials. A series of articles by Anwar al-Sadat appeared in the semi-official al-Jumhuriyah describing the "true" Islam. After Nasser had returned from the pilgrimage to Mekkah in August, the press gave wide coverage to his share in forming the "Islamic Congress"--an organization ostensibly created in order to promote links with the Islamic world in Asia and Africa but clearly also serving to take the wind out of the sails of the Brotherhood. Sadat was named the first chairman of the Congress.⁷⁴

Along with this propaganda offensive the regime tightened security. Cairo, one observer recalls, assumed "an atmosphere of civil war" with supplies of arms being discovered at intervals.⁷⁵ On October 26, 1954 Nasser was addressing a huge gathering of workers in Alexandria when a man, later identified as a member of the Brotherhood for nineteen years, fired eight shots at the Prime Minister. None of the bullets hit their target, but the assassination attempt provided the excuse for declaring full-scale war upon the Society, preparations for which had long been made. Within a few hours many of the leaders of the movement were in jail and mobs attacked and burned the Brotherhood's headquarters throughout the country. After five days, 500 leading members had been arrested, including Hodeiby and four members of his Supreme Guidance Council. At the end of a thorough purge 4000 Brethren had been taken into custody and numerous caches of arms and ammunition had been unearthed in mosques, graveyards and other hideouts.⁷⁶

On November 1 the government announced the establishment of a special court to try the Brethren who were accused of plotting the overthrow of the military regime. For the next two months or so the pages of the daily and weekly press were full with the testimony given at the trial about the conspiracy as well as with charges aimed at discrediting the movement. The leaders of the Society were described as "merchants of religion" who had used their followers for their own advantage or for setting up a barbaric "religious state" that would be in alliance with the imperialists and capitalists.⁷⁷ The brunt of the government's attack was borne by the secret apparatus. The Society's program of establishing a society governed by the principles of Islam was popular and the regime, therefore, for the most part limited itself to condemning the terrorists rather than the Brotherhood as a whole.⁷⁸

The trial of the plotters proceeded amid an air of tension created by reports of new plots to destroy the government and its head, Nasser. Hodeiby denied knowledge of the plot and it is likely that he indeed had not been in control of the secret apparatus. Several members of the latter, on the other hand, confessed and implicated other brethren. Lines of authority appeared to have broken down and morale seemed at an all-time low. "The general organization was so deeply split by its own internecine battles," notes Mitchell, "that it was relatively easy to cleave it further by giving full publicity to the 'confessions' and 'betrayals'--sometimes real, sometimes fabricated--of the various members."⁷⁹ Several witnesses testified about their contacts with Neguib. During the negotiation over the Suez Canal base the Brotherhood had distributed as a pamphlet a statement of the General opposing the draft agreement. There was no evidence to indicate that Neguib had known of the conspiracy to kill the Prime Minister, but his relations to the Brotherhood were close enough to give Nasser the opportunity to settle his conflict with the popular General once and for all. On November 14 he was removed from the Presidency and placed under house arrest. This time there were no Wafdists, Muslim Brothers or other sympathizers to organize demonstrations for him. Neguib disappeared from the political scene without causing a ripple of disturbance anywhere in Egypt.⁸⁰

On December 4, 1954 the first special tribunal pronounced sentence. The Brotherhood was ordered dissolved. Seven members of the Brotherhood's Guidance Council, advisors to Hodeiby, were condemned to life imprisonment at hard labor; two other members of the Council were given sentences of fifteen years in prison and two were acquitted. Seven men were sentenced to death by hanging--the assassin, and several leading figures in the organization, including Hodeiby, the Supreme Guide. On December 9, despite protests from the Arab world, six of the condemned were executed; the death sentence of Hodeiby was commuted to life imprisonment, ostensibly on account of his age and poor health.⁸¹

By February 1955 about 1000 Brethren had been tried and, according to a statement of Nasser made in June 1956, 867 men were convicted.⁸² Many of those acquitted and others who had not been tried nevertheless remained imprisoned. The Muslim Brotherhood with an estimated 200-300,000 members in 1953⁸³ was broken up. Nasser and his military junta now were the undisputed master of Egypt. The Revolution had passed through its stage of consolidation.

4. A Revolution in Search of Ideology

Nasser had triumphed over the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization, but he still faced the more difficult task of coming to terms with the roots of its popularity. The dictatorship supported by the army was securely entrenched, but in order to win the allegiance of the people and to bolster the legitimacy of its rule the regime had to pronounce goals and an ethos justifying them--in short, it had to develop an ideology. The main outline of such a program was practically given, representing as it did the longings of the rebelling officers and their countrymen: Egypt had to win its struggle for full national self-determination and measures had to be taken to raise the standard of living of the underprivileged masses. At the same time, the new rulers had to connect their revolution to the Islamic heritage still so powerful among the people.

Nasser's emergence as the strong man of Egypt was facilitated by the traditional subordination of the individual to the state or community in Muslim political practice and by the Islamic respect for power. Leadership has usually been regarded as legitimate when it could maintain itself in power. Hence an Egyptian magazine which deprecated the importance of the 1956 plebiscite confirming Nasser as President of the Republic was absolutely in the mainstream of Islamic thought when it wrote: "In itself it will be only the normalization of a situation whose fundamental legality has never been seriously challenged. In the Muslim world the justification for leadership has been ability and capacity.⁸⁴ The form of leadership is secondary and relatively unimportant." Still, power and force are not enough to inspire loyalty, and the revolutionary regime, seeking to establish links with the legacy of Islam, consciously encouraged the image of Nasser as the "new Saladin"⁸⁵--Saladin being the hero who not only drove the Christian crusaders from Jerusalem and extended Egypt's influence to the Tigris but who also fought for religion by overcoming the Ismaili Fatimid dynasty and restoring the country's Islamic orthodoxy.

In order to achieve its foreign policy and domestic goals Nasser's government had to inspire its people with a new spirit of political activism while at the same time it had to keep within the broad framework of religious tradition. At the time of the outbreak of the revolution, as we have seen, the Free officers were virtually without an ideology that could provide direction to the tasks of government. The general vision of the group was expressed in "Six Principles" which were intimated in the manifestos circulated secretly and privately by the officers before their seizure of power. The "Six Principles" were incorporated into the platform of the Liberation Rally in January 1953 and they were formulated more clearly in the preamble of the Constitution of 1956: "The eradication of all aspects of imperialism; the extinction of feudalism; the eradication of monopolies and the

control of capitalistic influence over the system of government; the establishment of a strong national army; the establishment of social justice; and the establishment of a sound democratic society."⁸⁶ Out of these general principles there emerged gradually an ideology which is often called "Nasserism"--a mixture of the old and the new that reflects the intellectual turbulence of the Islamic intelligentsia attempting to achieve modernization without being swallowed up by the West and thus losing its self-respect. The uneasy balance of traditional and revolutionary elements can be seen in two key planks of Nasserism--Arab nationalism and Arab Socialism.

Arab Nationalism

The initial Muslim response to European penetration of the Middle East had been pan-Islamism. But the fate of this search for the unity of all Muslims was sealed with the fall of the Ottoman empire after the First World War and the abolition of the caliphate by Attaturk in 1924. Its place in the struggle with British and French domination was taken by Arab nationalism--a "synthesis between universal pan-Islamism and the local nationalism of the petty Arab states that emerged from Ottoman ruins."⁸⁷ The early Arab nationalism was closely tied to the Western model--it stressed national self-determination and liberal constitutionalism. At this stage Arab nationalism would not be identical with Islam "since Islam comprised many more people than the Arabs and since it would also make nonsense of the claim that the Arabs were different from the Turks and therefore had the right to secede from them."⁸⁸

Prior to the Egyptian revolution of 1952, the ideological center of Arab nationalism was in Syria and Lebanon. Egypt had played an important role in the shaping of the cultural aspect of Arab consciousness by being the seat of several pan-Arab societies, but it was not until the nineteen-thirties that there developed any interest in the cause of Arab unity. To many Egyptians, aware of the rich Egyptian heritage of the Nile civilization that predated both the emergence of the Arabs and Islam, the term "Arab" was a synonym of backwardness.⁸⁹ By the time of the forties the pan-Arab idea had made headway; Egypt took an active role in the establishment of the Arab league in 1945. But the defeat of the Arabs in the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 led to a new strengthening of isolationism. Inter-Arab cooperation had failed a vital test and the feeling that Egypt should concentrate on its own affairs and the promotion of Egyptian nationalism was widespread among opinion makers.⁹⁰

The Free Officers who seized power in 1952, in line with the political temper of the time, were preoccupied with solving Egyptian problems. Relations with other Arab states for them were primarily a matter of foreign policy rather than ideology.⁹¹ In Nasser's

Philosophy of the Revolution, published in 1955, the term "Arab nationalism" does not appear. Nasser spoke of three circles within which Egypt was located and which determined its life--the Arab, the African and the Islamic spheres:

It is not without significance that our country is situated west of Asia, in contiguity with the Arab states with whose existence our own is interwoven. It is not without significance, too, that our country lies in northeast Africa, overlooking the Dark Continent, wherein rages a most tumultuous struggle between white colonizers and black inhabitants for control of its unlimited resources. Nor is it without significance that, when the Mongols swept away the ancient capitals of Islam, Islamic civilization and the Islamic heritage fell back on Egypt and took shelter there. Egypt protected them and saved them, while checking the onslaught of the Mongols at 'Ain Jalut. All these are fundamental realities with deep roots in our lives which we cannot--even if we try--escape or forget.⁹²

The Arab circle, Nasser maintained, was the most important, for Egypt was linked to the Arab world not only by the facts of geography and history, but also by a common religion. Still, the interests of Egypt clearly ranked first. Nasser spoke of "the tremendous possibilities" to be realized through the cooperation of the many millions of Muslims in the world, but, perhaps to differentiate his priorities from those of the Muslim Brotherhood, he added that such cooperation was not to go "beyond the bounds of their natural loyalty to their own countries."⁹³

If Nasser thus was espousing an essentially secular nationalism in 1955, emphasizing the primary allegiance to country before that of ethnic bonds or religion, he was soon to discover that the Egyptian masses could be reached and mobilized only by associating nationalism with Islam. For the urban Egyptian, in particular, the laborers and semi-educated who had made up the rank and file of the Brotherhood and whom Nasser was seeking to draw to the side of his regime, the emotional sustenance for the spirit of nationalism derived from an Islamic universalism. For these men to attain national dignity meant to resume the mission which Mohammed had inaugurated, it meant to reconstitute the Muslim community advocated in the prophet's teachings and achieved by his first followers, the Arabs. Nationalism, in short, meant Arab nationalism with a pronounced religious underpinning. Since nationalism is a force that draws on the achievements of the past and since the only glory the Arabs ever knew was achieved under the banner of Islam, Arab nationalism naturally was driven to lean upon the heritage of Islam and to "find its intellectual stimulus in the great Arab-Islamic culture of the past--a culture which was made possible by Islam."⁹⁴

Sunni Islam recognizes neither geographical nor ethnic boundaries and distinguishes merely between the community of faith, the umma, and the outside world of unbelievers. Upon this concept of umma Arab nationalism grafted the idea of nationhood and this transformation of a religious into a political community by and large was accepted by Muslims.⁹⁵ The masses could be enlisted through the appeal to the spirit of Islam; the intellectuals rallied to the standard of Arab unity on account of its potential in standing up to the encroaching West. The notion of an Arab nation thus merged with the Islamic concept of umma and in this manner Arab nationalism achieved a spiritual ethos and mass support. Blurring the theoretical distinction between the Islamic community and the Arab nation, "nationalism has been able to evolve as a modern expression of traditional Muslim sentiments regarding the unity, dignity, and historic destiny of the Community rather than flying in the face of such sentiments."⁹⁶

The Islamization of nationalism has had many advantages. Islam provided a sense of history, identity and solidarity, helping to build a heritage distinctive from both Western liberalism and communism. Rather than having to oppose the tide of Muslim militancy, manifested in the popularity of the Brotherhood, Nasser's regime was thus able to swim with it. At the same time, this Arab nationalism with Islamic overtones has not infrequently created problems for Nasser--domestically as well as in foreign relations. For Egypt's Christian minority, the Copts, the failure to separate nationalism from religion has meant emotional and other more tangible hardships to which we will return. During the short-lived union of Egypt and Syria, the latter with a sizable Christian population, the Islamic aspects of Arab nationalism had to be downgraded, especially since Christian Arabs have had a leading part in its formulation and have tended to stress its secular components. The vague nature of Arab nationalism, based upon the longing for a restored Muslim community and dreams of empire, has tended to give an appearance of unity where none exists. Underneath the commitment to Arab unity lie sharp cleavages over the content and the means of achieving such unity.⁹⁷ The record of Nasser's relations with the rest of the Arab world bears witness to the difficulty of linking a coherent and rational foreign policy to as emotional and undefined a principle as Arab nationalism.

Until 1955 Nasser concentrated on Egyptian affairs and was content with being one of the leaders of the Arab world. From 1955 on he began to pursue an increasingly aggressive foreign policy and to assume the role of spokesman for the Arab people. A number of factors were involved in this reorientation. Iraq's alignment with the West in the Baghdad Pact of 1955 threatened the political and military isolation of Egypt; Nasser reacted by actively promoting Arab solidarity and unity--a policy he has continued to pursue to this day. Domestically the new emphasis on Arab nationalism and the fight against imperialism helped divert attention from the difficulties involved in social and economic

reform. The milestones in this nationalistic and pan-Arab course are well known: In late 1955 Nasser concluded a barter agreement for arms with Czechoslovakia, in 1956 he nationalized the Suez Canal, and in 1957 Nasser emerged from the Suez war as the hero who had defeated two major powers, Britain and France. In February 1958, Syria and Egypt agreed to form the United Arab Republic. Nasser was at the pinnacle of prestige. He had successfully defied the Western powers and he had made a major advance along the road to Arab unity. For the Arab masses all over the Middle East Nasser was the new Saladin, the hero who was going to fulfill their longings and hopes.

But Arab unity was more easily glorified than achieved. The introduction in Syria of economic and administrative reforms based upon Egyptian rather than Syrian needs alienated wide segments of Syrian society and ultimately led to the secession of Syria.⁹⁸ "The Charter of National Action", a lengthy programmatic document adopted by the Nasser regime in June 1962, proclaimed a new formula: Arab unity to succeed presupposed the radical and revolutionary transformation of society in a socialist direction. The merger of states with deeply contrasting socio-economic and political structures could not lead to real and lasting unity. Steps must be taken "to fill the economic and social gaps occurring between various Arab states as a result of imperialist-inspired differences in stages of development"⁹⁹ and the UAR had the duty to support all popular progressive movements in the Arab world that sought to close these gaps.

The proclamation of the Charter restored some of Nasser's popularity, but the new tactic could no more nullify and overcome the diversities of environment, language, political experience and abilities that stood in the way of Arab unity than the earlier more direct approach. At the end of 1963, notes one observer, "more Arab states were at each other's throats at once than ever before....Of the thirteen member states of the Arab League, only three were on satisfactory terms with everyone."¹⁰⁰ The United Arab Republic and Saudi Arabia were in conflict over the future of Yemen and even the presence of 40,000 Egyptian troops was unable to break the deadlock between the Royalist and Republican forces. Egypt no longer was the leading power in the Arab world which now had several competing revolutionary centers--Syria, Iraq, Algeria as well as the United Arab Republic.

In the mid-1960's the attainment of Arab unity thus was as elusive a goal as ever. All of the existing Arab nation-states, despite their partly artificial borders, had developed local ruling groups for whom the survival of these states was a matter of compelling self-interest. "The struggle to preserve them has served to exacerbate the countless factional feuds and rivalries that already rend Arab society."¹⁰¹ The only centrifugal forces in the Arab world were hostility to Israel and Islam.

But even the Muslim factor seems unable to provide a basis for a unified ideology as was demonstrated during the controversy over the so-called "Islamic Pact" in early 1966. When King Faisal of Saudi Arabia proposed the idea of an "Islamic conference" of heads

of Muslim states in Mecca, Nasser interpreted this proposal as an attempt to build a coalition of conservative states that would isolate revolutionary regimes like the United Arab Republic. Faisal's insistence that he had sought neither an alliance nor an anti-Egyptian campaign apparently was not mere rhetoric.¹⁰² Nevertheless, Nasser reacted with a vigor that indicated that an exposed nerve had been touched. The idea of an Islamic conference, Nasser reminded the Arab world, had been proposed by him as early as 1954, but the creation of the Baghdad Pact in 1955 had prevented the conference from convening. Real Islamic solidarity, he insisted, "is the solidarity of the Islamic peoples struggling against imperialism, not the solidarity between reactionary governments which are imperialist agents exploiting and falsifying Islam; reactionary governments that want to stop the march of history and the march of progress."¹⁰³ The Islamic Pact was an attempt to use the sacred principles of religion for reactionary ends, it was a forgery of religion aiming to attack and destroy the idea of Arab nationalism, "to stop the progressive Arab revolutionary tide in the Arab countries."¹⁰⁴ Clearly, Nasser was unwilling to let his political opponents wear the mantle of Islam. Islam was neither a factor upon which to build a viable pan-Arab unity nor yet an ideological component to be dispensed with.

Arab Socialism

If the appeal to Islam was a useful instrument for popularizing certain goals of Nasser's foreign policy, it was equally important in regard to the regime's social and economic program. Again, the impetus and initial shaping of policy was not and could not be derived from Islamic principles though Islamic loyalties could be enlisted to marshal support for these policies once adopted.¹⁰⁵

The Free Officers, upon seizing power in 1952, as we have seen, had neither an ideology nor a clear program of social and economic reform. They were revolted by Egypt's gross inequality and poverty, a sentiment that found its expression in one of the "Six Principles"--the demand for "the establishment of social justice." But the change and the transition from this statement of a general goal to the formulation of a socialist doctrine and a program of action was gradual, pragmatic and slow. During the early years, in fact, the new regime went out of its way to allay suspicions that it was left-wing in character. "We are not Socialists," insisted Gamal Salem, Minister of National Guidance, in early 1954, "I think our economy can only prosper under free enterprise."¹⁰⁶ Businessmen participated actively in the formulation of a program of development; incentives and private investments were relied upon to spur and encourage growth. The ranks of the Free Officers were purged of leftish elements and most of Egypt's Communists were imprisoned. The ring-leaders of a strike at a textile plant in August 1952 that had led to the seizure of the factory were summarily tried and hanged. Only the agrarian reform law of September 1952, which limited land ownership to a maximum of 200 feddans (about 200 acres), struck a somewhat different note and gave the officers their first link with the peasant masses.¹⁰⁷

During the years 1952-56 the Egyptian economy experienced a firm government and the state moved gradually away from a laissez-faire approach. Still, economic and social policy essentially continued to follow the lines initiated before the 1952 coup and the period has been described as the "free-enterprise phase of the Egyptian revolution."¹⁰⁸ Perceptable changes took place after the Suez war of 1956. Realizing that Egypt's economic problems were far more serious than they had realized at first, the officers gradually were driven to more drastic measures. Certain foreign and later also Egyptian establishments were nationalized, a program of central planning and intensified industrialization was initiated, and the taxation of higher incomes was increased sharply. These measures, extending state control over private enterprise, "were accompanied by a swift break-away from the west in both political alignment and ideological approach and by an increasing use in public pronouncements and the press, of pseudo-Marxist and class-war slogans."¹⁰⁹ The term "controlled capitalist economy," employed by Nasser in 1958, accurately describes this phase of the Revolution.

Egypt's first Five-year plan, formulated in 1959-60, had envisaged a mixed economy and close cooperation between the public and private sectors of the economy. But the planners soon found that private enterprise was slow to comply with the targets for production, investment and saving. When exhortations and incentives failed to bring about adherence to the goals of the central plan, the regime decided to inaugurate what is now referred to in Egypt as the "Social Revolution." In July 1961, coinciding with the ninth anniversary of the revolution, a large share of Egypt's industrial and commercial property was nationalized. A new land reform law prohibited any individual from owning more than 100 and any family more than 300 feddans of agricultural land.¹¹⁰ Following the secession of Syria in September of the same year, and in the face of a difficult internal economic situation caused by floods and damage by parasites to the cotton crop, the property of some 850 persons was sequestered. A vigorous press campaign was launched against "reactionary, feudalist, and capitalist elements" and over 7,000 persons, affected by the expropriation laws, were deprived of their political rights.¹¹¹

The ideological justification of the "Social Revolution" by way of a theory of Arab socialism came after the event. Egypt's economic and social system, that had developed piecemeal and by trial and error rather than according to a predetermined plan, now was given a theoretical underpinning: the blueprint of a socialist society was laid out. The socialist revolution, Nasser explained in August 1961, was succeeding in "eradicating feudalism, in destroying the dictatorship of capital, and in establishing social justice, entirely by peaceful means."¹¹² The goal was the elimination of class distinctions. It was due to the particular circumstances of the Egyptian revolution, Nasser admitted in November 1961, "that the revolutionary application, our revolutionary application, may be prior to the theory. Then what is the theory? The theory is the evidence of the action."¹¹³

The official formulation of "Arab Socialism" was presented to the Egyptian people in the Charter of May 1962. This lengthy document attempted to explain the various reforms promulgated since 1961 as well as to outline a program for future action. Socialism, according to the Charter, "is the way to social freedom; social freedom means equal opportunity to every citizen to obtain a fair share of the national wealth."¹¹⁴ But the national wealth must not only be redistributed but also expanded. The national income had to be doubled every ten years which could only be achieved through scientific planning. An efficient public sector was to provide leadership--heavy industry and financial institutions had to be owned by the state. In light and medium industry and external trade mixed ownership could prevail. "In the agricultural sector, Arab socialism does not believe in the nationalization of land but in individual ownership within limits that prevent feudalism."¹¹⁵

The idea of Arab socialism has continued to dominate the ideology of the Nasser regime. The struggle for socialism has become the theme for the mobilization of maximum effort and the striving for economic growth. "The Revolution of July 23," Nasser stated in November 1964, "was but an introduction to the Revolution."¹¹⁶ The achievement of a socialist society, he warned, would be far more difficult than the fight against the external enemy. The gains chalked up by the "Social Revolution" until now support Nasser's realistic appraisal. Socialist planning, now in its seventh year, so far has not brought about rapid economic development and a decisive improvement in the standard of living. The extension of public ownership in itself could not and did not work wonders.

In 1952 about one half of one per cent of all proprietors owned 34.2 per cent of the land and 5.2 per cent owned another 30.5 per cent of all landed property.¹¹⁷ Agrarian reform has broken the power of the landlords, but most rural families have not benefited from the redistribution of land and remain either landless or with just enough land to produce the most meagre subsistence. Even at the completion of agrarian reform less than eight percent of all rural families will have received some land.¹¹⁸ The law has brought no relief to the landless laborers who in 1958 made up 73 per cent of the rural population.¹¹⁹ Inequality of wealth and income have been reduced through a series of nationalizations, sequestrations, the fixing of maximum salaries and the extension of social services. But those who have gained most, concludes one observer, "seem to have been middling peasants, the employees of corporate industry and commerce, and middle-class tenants of rented accommodations, three groups who altogether form no more than a small and privileged minority of the population."¹²⁰ For the masses of the Egyptian people a marked improvement in their lot will depend upon the achievement of a rate of economic expansion sufficient to outpace substantially the growth of population, the latter threatening to nullify the benefits of even as spectacular a development project as the Aswan dam.

The scale of Egypt's "Social Revolution" thus has not been as far-reaching as official statements have depicted it. Still, for

Egypt's tradition-bound masses the changes have been revolutionary enough to require an elaborate program of ideological justification that seeks to prove the compatibility of Arab Socialism with Islam. Nasser himself took the lead in 1961 when he distinguished Arab Socialism from Marxian Socialism and insisted that the former not only was not opposed to Islam but actually derived from it. We have said, he explained, that "our religion is a socialist one and that in the middle ages Islam had successfully applied the first socialist experiment in the world." Reactionaries like King Hussein, Nasser continued, allege "that socialism is against Islam. Islam in his conception implies harems and palaces, usurping the people's money and leaving them poor and naked." That was all wrong. "Islam implies equity and justice. The Arab people will never be deceived."¹²¹

Since then Nasser time and again has stressed the same central theme. A few passages, taken from a collection of Nasser's speeches published in 1964, will have to suffice as a sample: "Islam is the first religion to call for socialism, the first religion to call for equality and the first to call for an end to domination and inequality." "Mohammad, God's blessing be on him, gave us the example of social justice, progress and development, and thus Islam was able in these early days to defeat the strongest nations...and spread to all corners of the earth because it was the religion of righteousness, freedom, justice and equality." Our enemies "say that socialism is infidelity. But is socialism really what they describe by this term? What they describe applies to raising slaves, hoarding money and usurping the people's wealth. This is infidelity and this is against religion and Islam. What we apply in our country is the law of justice and the law of God."¹²²

Reinforcing Nasser's speeches, since 1961 the regime has sponsored a large amount of scholarly writing and a flood of propaganda propounding the unity of Arab Socialism and Islam. A formal legal opinion (fatwa), issued by a canon lawyer (mufti) in 1962, dealt with the question whether the socialist laws of 1961 were averse to the spirit of Islam. The Muslim expert, citing the Koran and the traditions, concluded that these laws were sanctioned by Islamic jurisprudence. "Private ownership is legitimate in the eyes of Islamic jurisprudence as long as the owner observes the ordinances of Allah concerning his wealth. But if he does not abide by them, the ruler is entitled to devise the laws and regulations which force him to adhere to the commandments of God."¹²³ The law of agrarian reform and the restriction of land ownership aimed at realizing the public good and social justice: "the distribution of wealth between the poor and the rich so that it may not be circulated among the rich only, is a procedure approved of by Islamic jurisprudence."¹²⁴ Islam prohibited the monopoly of food and similar resources and "thus we can sanction the nationalization of public institutions indispensable to everyday life such as the institution established to secure water, electricity and easy transport."¹²⁵

Other writers have gone further and have argued, as Nasser himself had done, that Arab socialism not only was not averse to Islam

but actually represented the fulfillment of the prophet's commands. "Arab socialism is the only road to human freedom, it is the only way to social freedom as Islam calls for;...our socialist revolution aims with all its strength at building a society of justice and equality, thus receiving its principles and inspiration from the pillars of Islam."¹²⁶ Under feudalism and capitalism, argued another author, the individual leads a self-seeking existence. Under Arab socialism, on the other hand, the individual was guided to benefit himself and his society. "Arab socialism is the system that can implement the Islamic concept of requiring the individual to fulfill his duties. In preparing him to fulfill the cooperative duties in which he is a supervisor and a partner at the same time, and in requiring him to consider the interest of the group...it thus reflects the Islamic ideal which requires a righteous individual and a cooperative society."¹²⁷ Socialism based upon Islam did not deny the interests of the individual though it does oppose the struggle between classes that results in enmity and hate. "Thus it has made work the basis of distributing wealth and reward, and it forbade excessive wealth and its exploitation of others."¹²⁸ Islam did not allow unlimited freedom of ownership but insisted on conditions that would guarantee justice and equality. "Islam allowed the ruler to strike those who do not observe these conditions and allowed him to take property and redistribute it to the people in accordance with the general and public good."¹²⁹

It is not necessary to challenge the sincerity of these writers in order to see that this endeavor of reconciling socialism and Islam raises the same problems as did the attempt to establish a synthesis between nationalism and Islam. The political, economic and social principles evolved by a tribal society in the seventh century can hardly be expected to fit the complexities of life in the twentieth century. Nations like justice and equality are vague enough to accommodate a great variety of concrete programs. It is not difficult for modernists to go back to the Koran and the traditions and to find there permission for whatever social reform they wish to promote and uphold. "Just as in the second century of Islam the fabrication of hadiths and the elaboration of a system of deductive legal reasoning had sanctified the assimilation of existing local customs and precedents into a unified Islamic system of law, so today the modernist principles may be said to have performed an assimilative function."¹³⁰ And yet, it is clear that this search for the endorsement of Islam by way of a highly selective reading and quoting of holy writ has to some extent the same quality of "pious fraud" which Ignaz Goldziher had attributed to the outright forgery of many of the early traditions.¹³¹ Such a romanticizing of the Muslim past can foster national pride and it can help justify and legitimize the contemporary state's actions; it cannot, however, define objectives or provide guidance in solving the practical problems of modernization. Writing in 1945, Sir Hamilton Gibb expressed the hope that Muslim intellectuals would turn to creative thinking, "removed from the intellectual confusions and the paralyzing romanticism which cloud the minds of the modernists of today."¹³² This expectation, it appears, has been fulfilled only in part.

The idea of Arab socialism, as Malcom Kerr has noted in a perceptive article, fulfills some of the nationalist and religious desires of the masses. "It offers advancement, social harmony, equality, public morality, collective self-respect. It responds to the populism of the nationalist, and to the believing Muslim's desire for a straight path to follow amid the uncertainties of modern life... the umma has taken its affairs in hand, in an assertion of collective will that appeals to nationalists, and simultaneously in a spirit of welcoming of communal duty and a striving for the Right that are the essence of jihad."¹³³ At the same time, the Islamic component of socialism, no matter how artificially contrived, may in time create difficulties. Arab socialism, unlike communism, as the propagandists emphasize constantly, rejects class violence and does not attack the institution of private property as such. In the future this conservative element, implying reconciliation rather than a class struggle, could inhibit the forward march of the social revolution. Lastly, Islam is a religion in which precedent and tradition carry great weight-- it "tends to place on innovators and individualists the burden of proof of the moral acceptability of their actions." Religion thus reinforces the bureaucratic mentality, the attachment to routine, and it counteracts "the mixture of scientism, experimentalism, Marxism-Leninism, activism, and self-assertiveness from which so far the revolution has acquired much of its momentum."¹³⁴ For the time being these different elements in the official ideology live alongside each other; eventually their coexistence may end and break up.

5. The Religious Policy of a Modernizing Regime

The same uneasy coexistence of religious and secular elements which we have found in the ideology of the Egyptian Revolution can be noted in the regime's general attitude toward religion as expressed in its policy toward the religious establishment, the religious courts, education and the status of religious minorities. Again, we observe here the attempt to harness religious sentiments for the implementation of national goals that are themselves set and determined by considerations of state policy and utility rather than religion.

The officers overthrowing the decadent monarchy in 1952, wrote Nguib a few years later, did not want to turn their backs on the Islamic faith, but they felt that the message preached by the prophet had to be interpreted with due regard to the great changes that had occurred since those early days. A cosmopolitan country like Egypt had to be governed "by means of a secular republic in which the rights of minorities shall be respected so long as the minorities, in turn, respect the Islamic way of life."¹³⁵ In line with this principle, the provisional constitution of February 1953 provided for freedom of religious belief and the equality of all Egyptians before the law.¹³⁶ The constitution of January 1956 declared Islam to be the religion of the state and Arabic its official language, but the rights of minorities were also mentioned: "Liberty of conscience is absolute. The State protects the free exercise of religion in conformity with the customs in force in Egypt and upon the conditions that it does not infringe public order or good morals."¹³⁷ The new provisional constitution of 1958, on the other hand, drawn up after the union with Syria, which includes a large group of Christian minorities identified with a militant but secular version of Arab nationalism, made no reference to Islam. Lastly, the temporary constitution of 1964, adopted after the secession of Syria, again went back to the formula of 1956--Islam was the religion of the state and freedom of worship was protected as long as it was in accordance with public order and morality.¹³⁸

All of these constitutional instruments vested sovereignty in the nation rather than in God or the shari'a as required by Islamic orthodoxy. In another demonstration of secularism on September 21, 1955 the regime announced that all religious or communal courts would be abolished on January 1, 1956 and their functions assumed by national courts. An explanatory memorandum affirmed the Western principle of national sovereignty: "the rules of public law require that the sovereignty of the state be complete and absolute in the interior, and that all those who live in it, without distinction of nationality, be submitted to the laws of the country, to its courts and to a single jurisdiction....The government cannot suffer the existence on the national territory of judiciary autonomies which impose their will upon it, oppose its policy of reform, or, lastly choose their own way of reform."¹³⁹

A civil court system and Western-inspired law had been encroaching upon the domain of the shari'a in Egypt for several decades. The latter had been pushed aside in one area of social life after another until it had become largely restricted to the realms of personal status--family, marriage, divorce, inheritance--and even in the sphere of family law Western ideas had been introduced by way of various ingenious expedients.¹⁴⁰ The new legislation provided that the national courts would continue to apply the religious law, but there can be no doubt that the religious establishment had been decisively undermined. Henceforth, the immutable law of Islam, ostensibly binding upon the ruler and his subjects, was going to be administered by sufferance of the sovereign and in accordance with a procedure determined by him. It was now only a question of time until the government would feel strong enough to challenge not only autonomous judicial organizations on grounds of sovereignty but the principle of independent and religiously inspired law as well.¹⁴¹ Inside Egypt no protest was tolerated, but the ulama of Aleppo in a protest cable to Nasser described the new legislation as a "blow to Divine law and a wound inflicted on the heart of Islam;" in Damascus the Muslim Brethren accused Nasser of having "declared war on Islam."¹⁴²

On the surface it thus seemed as if Nasser, like Atatürk thirty years earlier, was beginning a program of complete secularization. The abolition of the religious courts seen together with the suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood, the citadel of Islamic militancy, appeared to indicate that the regime was launched on the "kemalization" of Egypt. But such a conclusion was and remains quite erroneous. Officially and in its constitution Nasser's Egypt is a secular nation state, guaranteeing equality of rights and obligations irrespective of race, language and religion as well as freedom of worship. The fact that Islam is declared to be the religion of the state could be considered of largely deferential character and of no more significance than the continuation of the Church of England as the established church in England. But legal and constitutional appearances can be deceptive and they do not tell the entire story as Egypt's Christian minorities, especially the Copts, can testify.

The abolition of the religious courts for example, no doubt was a step toward national unity, but its implementation did not make it quite the progressive move it appeared to be. The Christian courts were indeed abolished and their judges retired, but most judges and clerks of the Muslim courts were incorporated into the national judicial system. Catholic and Copts leaders protested this and other ramifications of the new law but their objections were brushed aside. More basically, over the years the Nasser regime has increasingly assumed a Muslim tone.

In the early days of the revolution, the military junta encouraged the propagation of the slogan, "Religion is for God--and the country is for all." But with the emergence of Arab nationalism as official ideology came an Islamization of life which has hit especially hard Egypt's four million Copts who consider themselves the original

human stock of the Nile valley. "In the Coptic language, 'Copts' means 'people of Egypt' and the Copts use the term literally, referring to themselves as the true Egyptians."¹⁴³ Yet, the constitution of 1964, like that of 1956, declares that the Egyptian people are part of the Arab nation and for the masses of the Egyptian people "Arab" means "Muslim"; the true Arab or Egyptian is a Muslim. "It is mainly the Christians of the Middle East who extend the coverage of the label Arab to include themselves," notes a student of the Copts. "For Moslems, the term applies only to those who believe that the mission of Mohammed is the central fact of history."¹⁴⁴ As a result non-Muslims are increasingly considered second-class citizens and despite the official policy of non-discrimination, the Copts and other minorities experience growing pressure.

The Nasser regime not only does not fight the Islamic version of Arab nationalism, but, as we have seen, finds it expedient to use it. To be sure, the kind of Islam encouraged by the government is reformist in character and it is tied to social change and modernization. "The essence of religious messages does not conflict with the facts of our life," stated the National Charter in 1962; "the conflict arises only in [a] certain situation as a result of attempts made by reactionary elements to exploit religion--against its nature and spirit--with a view to impeding progress. These elements fabricate false interpretations of religion in flagrant contradiction with its noble and divine mission."¹⁴⁵ Nasser, too, seeking to channel Islamic loyalties in the direction of social and economic progress, in his speeches regularly stresses the importance of Islam while at the same time insisting that it must be free from the forces of fanaticism and terrorism--an obvious allusion to the Muslim Brotherhood. "Islam has no clergy nor any of the customs which some people want to enforce upon our minds," Nasser told a delegation from Yemen in 1963. "Islam has no inherited rule. It does not give one Moslem any privilege over another...No one has an advantage over the other but piety. As Moslems we must accordingly do this and know this. As Moslems we must have a high degree of consciousness as to achieve dignity for the Arabs and Islam. The Republic is the road to this... The Revolution has assumed its responsibility with a view to give freedom to the individual, to the human being, to the Arab Moslem."¹⁴⁶ Islam, said Nasser, is a progressive religion--a religion of evolution, freedom and justice. Reactionaries like Saud, Faisal, and Hussein do not represent Islam but "impiety and ungodliness. They represent apostasy and exploitation."¹⁴⁷

Other highly-placed officials have developed the same modernistic interpretation of Islam, among them Anwar Sadat, often the regime's spokesman with regard to Muslim affairs. Writing in the early 1960's Sadat pleaded for a rejuvenated Islam that would be as free of reactionary elements as Christianity had succeeded in becoming:

Europe knows that religion was not sent by God so that people prepare themselves for entering heaven, but it recognized after a great struggle between the thinkers who knew the true religion and the priests who lived on superstition and jugglery,

that religion came to destroy people's chains and protect them from oppression and ignorance, and to protect them from what threatens their living, science and freedom. Europe knew the truth and we the Muslims let it escape us, when it was in our hands and we could have worked on its guidance for a greater future...¹⁴⁸

Muslims had to learn that Mohammed had not meant to deny man's right to science and knowledge. They had to drive out the "traders of religion" who had erected an iron curtain between the minds of Muslims and world culture. "Civilization is deviation, urbanization is evil, and progress is disobeying the will of God. This is the call of the priesthood in the Muslim countries, as if the discovery of methods of curing diseases and the invention of electricity and the building of factories and the education of minds is a crime that angers God."¹⁴⁹ The religion of Islam, Sadat insisted, came to call people to fight the oppressors, to destroy feudalism and end all exploitation; it did not come to make people remain all their life kneeling and praying to enter heaven. The Muslim world had to remove the reactionary traders of religion and achieve a revival of the original spirit of Islam--an Islam free of fanaticism and open to science and knowledge. "After this no power can stand in the way of our accomplishing the goals of justice and peace which are the goals of our prophet Mohammed."¹⁵⁰

In order to achieve the aim of modernizing Islam the Nasser regime had to modernize al-Azhar, the famous center of Islamic learning. By 1961 the government felt strong enough to tackle the great Koranic university in Cairo that is looked upon with awe in the entire Muslim world and traditionally has made Egypt's capital the intellectual center of Islam. Students come to al-Azhar from as far as Turkestan, Indonesia and China; its great prestige establishes al-Azhar as a political as well as a religious asset.

Despite certain reforms in curriculum and organization that had taken place between 1908 and 1936, al-Azhar in 1952 was a citadel of orthodoxy.¹⁵¹ Its theologians invoked the doctrine of ijma (the principle of consensus) in order to put the stamp of infallibility and unchangeability upon Islamic doctrine and they denied the right of individual interpretation (ijtihad). In vain had modernist reformers like al-Afghani and Abduh pleaded for a reopening of the "gate of ijtihad." Al-Azhar regarded the shari'a as an essentially static body of doctrine and its ulama stood firm against the spirit of innovation. Books like Ali Abd al-Raziq's Islam and the Principles of Government, that was published in 1925 and argued for the separation of religion and politics, and Khalid Muhammad Khalid's From Here We Start of 1950, rejecting the principle of theocratic government, were banned by al-Azhar.¹⁵² Opposing all attempts to modernize Egyptian life and thought and allying itself with the unpopular throne, al-Azhar alienated the nationalists and reformers; at the time the Free Officers seized power it was sadly out of touch with Egyptian realities.

The military junta at first refrained from antagonizing al-Azhar. "Using General Naguib as their symbol and spokesman, the clique of Young Officers gave public assurances to the 'ulama' of al-Azhar that they stood for and would uphold sound Islamic principles. Besides paying frequent official visits to al-Azhar's shaykhs (religious dignitaries), the Free Officers made it a conspicuous collective habit to pass the important Friday prayer at al-Azhar or one of the other great mosques of Cairo where the shaykhs and public could bear witness to their piety."¹⁵³ The ulama, at least publicly, responded with traditional servility. After the attempt upon Nasser's life in October 1954, the council of al-Azhar issued a declaration repudiating the violent tactics of the Brotherhood.¹⁵⁴ In September 1955, following the publication of the decree announcing the forthcoming abolition of the religious courts, the rector of al-Azhar visited the president in order to thank him on behalf of the ulama for having taken the "liberating step" of suppressing the shari'a and other communal courts.¹⁵⁵ There was grumbling behind the scenes about measures that threatened further to complicate the placing in jobs of Azhar graduates, but the Grand Mufti of Egypt went out of his way to urge the staff of the Muslim courts to do their best in the new framework of national courts.¹⁵⁶ When the Canal Zone was attacked in 1956, al-Azhar organized classes for military training, and when Communist agitation in Iraq in March 1959 threatened Nasser's plans for Arab unity, the newly appointed rector declared a holy war against Communism.¹⁵⁷

However, behind the surface there was growing tension. The regime was determined to bring al-Azhar into line with its program of Islamic reform, but the succession of military men, appointed as directors of al-Azhar affairs, were unable to overcome the shaykhs' conservatism and their opposition to government interference in the internal affairs of al-Azhar. Several highly placed ulama resigned in protest against what they termed the government's meddling in religious affairs.¹⁵⁸ Finally, in the summer of 1961, the government revealed plans for the total reorganization of the venerable institution. Besides seeking to use al-Azhar in its campaign for a modernistic Islam, the regime was driven to this step also by the urgent need of increasing facilities for the output of graduates in secular subjects. On June 22, 1961, the National Assembly adopted a law that, in effect, made al-Azhar the fifth Egyptian state university. New faculties of Business Administration, Engineering, Agriculture and Medicine were created, and the administration of the entire reformed university, including the old al-Azhar, were put into the hands of men appointed by the government. Al-Azhar had been "nationalized."¹⁵⁹

In explaining and justifying the drastic move, the government argued that the old al-Azhar had isolated the men of religion from real life whereas Islam, especially in the Muslim world liberated from colonialism should "not be reduced to a mere profession or a cause of idleness and waste in society."¹⁶⁰ Under the headline "Religion is not a profession," one paper wrote:

The revolution, the banner of which was raised in al-Azhar University, is the first real upheaval which has taken place in that great institution for the past 1000 years. The youth who will be enrolled in al-Azhar will not do so to adopt religion as a profession since religion is not a trade! The feeling of increasing isolation which has been suffered by tens of thousands of al-Azhar students and graduates will come to an end. Moreover, the thousands of the youth who come from all parts of Asia and Africa to study at the greatest Islamic institution will no longer return to their countries to live on the dole or to become a burden on their fellow countrymen, but will return as useful elements in building up their homelands on modern foundations apart from acquiring a deep insight into religion.¹⁶¹

Since reorganization, interference with the actual teaching of Islamic subjects appears to have been minimal, but the relative importance of the religious faculties is gradually decreasing and the kind of Islam being taught by newly appointed instructors is in line with the government's drive to rejuvenate Islamic culture and to bridge the gap between religion and modern thought. The new graduates of al-Azhar, the regime desires, are to become the missionaries of Islamic socialism among the people--to function as a link between the government and the illiterate or semi-literate majority of the people. Sayed Hussein al-Shafei, Vice-president and Minister of Social Affairs, in an address to the shaykhs delivered in late 1961 admonished them to shoulder the important task of enlightening the masses:

I call on you to transform mosques into centres of radiation. It is not enough that mosques should be devoted to progress only. The masses have launched a campaign to reorganize its ranks, to strengthen their... [and]...the call for social revolution is the call for mercy...Anyone who stands in the face of justice seeks the oppression; anyone who stands in the way of self-sufficiency of his country does aim at spreading poverty, and anyone who tries to work for dissension among the people opens the way for the return of political factions, reactionaries and opportunists, who are all as dangerous as infidelity, hypocrisy and polytheism...Let mosques become from now on sources of light, and means for tipping the balance in favour of the faithful and for isolating hypocrites.¹⁶²

While some radical factions within the regime appear to want to destroy the ulama as a class, the majority seek to use them in order to reach the masses still solidly grounded in the Islamic tradition.¹⁶³ No detailed information is available about the success of this endeavor but it is unlikely to run into great difficulties. Even before 1952 preachers had received directives from the government as to the content of their sermons and preachings,¹⁶⁴ and this practice continued after the victory of the Free Officers. According to one source, "every week each preacher receives a written directive from the Ministry

of Waqfs telling him the topic of that week's sermon. He can either write his own sermon on that topic or use a sermon written by the Ministry of Waqfs."¹⁶⁵ In addition, the government broadcasts Friday sermons on the state radio which extoll Arab nationalism and socialism and equate the two with Islam. The preachers of these radio sermons, selected by the government, recall the great victories of Muhammed and Saladin, which they attribute to the will of God, and they reassure the masses that divine help to his believers will continue to be forthcoming. The sermons support the new message of a united Arab nation but wrap it up in the old message of Islam. Seeking to popularize the program of social and economic modernization and to prove that it is in accordance with Islamic principles, the regime uses the Friday sermon as a channel of communication through which to educate and indoctrinate as well as to bolster the legitimacy of its rule.¹⁶⁶ Both radio and television not only schedule several daily readings from the Koran but also broadcast discussions of contemporary religious problems.

The appeal to a new Islam is important not only with regard to Egypt's domestic policies but also in order to strengthen the U.A.R.'s ties with other Islamic states in Asia and Africa. In 1961, as part of the reorganization of al-Azhar, an Islamic Research Academy (also known as Council of Islamic Research) was created which, according to the law,

undertakes the study of all matters related to such research, and works towards the renewal of Moslem culture, its liberation from intrusion, vestiges and traces of political and ideological fanaticism, its demonstration in its pure and original substance, promoting knowledge of it at every level and in every locality, the expression of opinion on new ideological or social problems affecting the creed, and assuming the responsibilities of the call for the sake of the Religion with wisdom and good counsel.¹⁶⁷

No more than 20 of the 50 council members were to be citizens of the U.A.R.; the council was to be an international body of scholars working for the modernization of Islam.

The first international Congress organized by the Islamic Research Academy met in Cairo in March 1964 with delegates from 42 countries in attendance. Papers were presented and discussions held on topics such as the status of private property in Islamic law, the rights of women, and the problem of Muslim unity. The Congress adopted a number of resolutions that were general and vague enough not to offend anyone. The second congress, meeting in May 1965, went on record against the charging of interest on loans, against slavery, and for making Islamic law the main source of all legislation. Birth control, the delegates decided, could be allowed only "in cases of absolute necessity" and should not be encouraged by law. "Islam, is desirous of increasing the offspring for it strengthens the Islamic nation socially, economically, militarily, and strengthens its dignity and defence."¹⁶⁸ In October 1966 the conference met for the third time amid hopes for an Islam free of fanaticism and imbued with tolerance.¹⁶⁹

The reaction of the Islamic world to Nasser's new pan-Islamism has been mixed. Egyptian muslim influence in South and East Asia is very limited; in much of the Middle East Nasser's calls for Arab unity find a ready echo but the intellectuals interested in religious matters distrust Egyptian Islam as being in the service of the U.A.R. power politics. In many parts of Black Africa, as in Northern Nigeria, Guinea and Mali, Islam is spreading and Egyptian influence is considerable.¹⁷⁰ Wherever Egyptian Islam is making headway it is due less to the activities of al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy but to the work of another energetic organization, more completely controlled by the U.A.R. government, the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs established in 1960-61.

In September 1954, as has been mentioned earlier, during the final stage of the struggle with the Muslim Brotherhood, the regime had decreed the establishment of an "Islamic Congress" headed by Anwar Sadat. This body, directly under Nasser's supervision, for several years had functioned as the government's link with other Islamic countries--providing teachers, scholarships, programs of medical aid, etc.--as well as a vehicle for promoting the Islamic quality of the revolution at home. While the Islamic Congress helped reassure a tradition-bound public of the officers' desire to uphold and promote the message of Islam, the agency was never particularly active.¹⁷¹ In January 1961, Sadat was replaced as head of the Congress,¹⁷² and since shortly thereafter most of its activities appear to have been absorbed by a new body--the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs.

The Council includes scholars and professors from al-Azhar and other universities and it aims at spreading Islamic culture inside and outside the U.A.R. It seeks to create a scientific and rejuvenated Islam that will nourish the revolutionary era with the essence of Islamic civilization and "go side by side with the nationalist movement and that of Arab unity, to support and reinforce them."¹⁷³ The Council publishes the journal Minbar al-Islam in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish as well as the series, "Islamic Books," "Essentials of Islam," and "Studies in Islam." Since 1960 3,200,000 copies of these publications have reached readers in the U.A.R.; 1,400,000 copies were placed in Egyptian schools, libraries, mosques, prisons, social clubs and in the hands of various religious organizations such as the Young Men's Muslim Association and the Society for the Protection of the Holy Koran. The Council has supplied large quantities of these publication also to Muslim communities in other countries and it has distributed recordings of the entire Koran and prayer instructions in several languages. Money has been contributed for the construction of mosques, Islamic cultural centers in Asia, Africa and Latin America; selected scholars and famous reciters of the Koran have been sent to various parts of the Muslim world. Scholarships are provided for foreign students to enable them to study at al-Azhar and other Egyptian universities--in 1965 the U.A.R. had a total of 20,000 foreign students from 72 Islamic countries. "The Nasser City for Islamic Missions" at al-Abassiyah is being built and so far provides lodging for 6,000 students.¹⁷⁴

The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, like the Islamic Congress and the Islamic Research Academy, are important instruments for convincing people both inside and outside the U.A.R. that the revolutionary regime is anxious to defend the faith and they serve as an educational force in promoting a new modernistic Islam. These agencies also steal some of the thunder of the Muslim Brotherhood and help isolate its followers. For example, while the Brotherhood, together with some of the ulama, has opposed birth control, the regime since about 1962 has turned its attention to family planning and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs has been enlisted to help remove religious obstacles to such a program. Muhammad Tawfiq Uwaydah, Secretary-General of the council, told a press conference in Singapore in February 1967 that Islam strongly supports birth control. Ninety per cent of the Egyptian ulama, he declared, support it and the opponents are only a small minority of extremists.¹⁷⁵

Other methods of social control are invoked to accomplish the same objective. Religious instruction is mandatory in all schools; students get another exposure to the Koran through the study of the Arabic language which, being the language of the religion as well as of the nation, makes extensive use of the sacred book of Islam.¹⁷⁶ Religion, a recent writer suggested, should be related by the schools to other subjects in the curriculum; in this way it would become "a ladder to a better life and a means for solving society's problems."¹⁷⁷ A center for Muslim Youth Societies coordinates the work of these organizations and publishes a monthly journal, Majalat al-Shuban al-Muslimun (Islamic Youth Magazine.).

The encouragement of religion has paid political dividends. During the June 1967 war with Israel the theologians of al-Azhar, as during previous crises in foreign affairs, helped mobilize the country and summoned Muslims to the jihad against Israel and the imperialist Christian countries. National unity was demonstrated when the patriarch of the Copts supported the appeal. "Islamic and Coptic priests jointly hailed the 'holy war' as willed by God and therefore destined to be crowned by victory."¹⁷⁸ Even if the invocation of divine blessing was not sufficient on this occasion to guarantee triumph on the battlefield, the fact remains that the Nasser regime over the years has been able to develop a highly successful religious policy that strengthens the legitimacy of the revolutionary course both at home and abroad. The fact that even the lay and religious leaders of the Coptic community, whose fortunes have hardly improved since the 1952 revolt, have done their best to provide theological justification for the government's domestic and foreign program is a measure of the regime's adroit handling of the Islamic factor. While for the Muslim masses of Egypt the slogans of "Arab socialism" and "Arab nationalism" inevitably have religious overtones, the regime stops short of a complete Islamization of political life. Such a course not only would further alienate the religious minorities but might also jeopardize the modernizing policies of the military officers and facilitate the comeback of the Muslim Brotherhood which can always outdo any competitors in Islamic militancy.

6. Islam and the Pursuit of Legitimacy

The leaders of many developing nations live in two worlds at once. In order to raise their countries from poverty they seek to modernize and to acquire for their societies education and the advanced technical know-how of the West. At the same time to ingratiate themselves with their tradition-bound people, they have to appeal to native pride, communal and ethnic sentiments as well as religion. What makes the resulting crisis of identity and ideological outlook more severe is the fact that these leaders often have been unable to clarify for themselves a definite personal attitude to tradition and religiosity. Thus a policy toward religion which on the surface may look like a Machiavellian manipulation of religious sentiments is what it is sometimes not only as a result of considerations of expediency but also because of genuine uncertainty and ambivalence on the part of its originators.

The majority of the officers ruling Egypt, including Nasser, seem to fit this description. Well-informed observers of the Egyptian scene continue to report that most of the leaders of the revolution are practicing Muslims. "Of modest country stock, they have been unaffected by the wave of modernist scepticism and demoralization which has been sweeping over the Egyptian upper classes for over half a century."¹⁷⁹ "Abdel Nasser's belief in Islam," notes another writer, "appears genuine. He personally follows the rituals of his religion--not just for public display--and he takes part in the community prayer on Friday."¹⁸⁰ To be sure when Anwar Sadat in 1953 and Nasser at the height of the Suez crisis in 1956 took to the pulpits to address worshippers, they clearly were motivated not only by religious sentiments. Similarly, the attendance of Nasser with visiting Muslim dignitaries at Mosque services obviously serves mainly ceremonial purposes. Nevertheless, the appeal to religion is more than just propaganda. Nasser appeared to be sincere when he declared in 1963:

We boast that we stick to religion, each one of us according to his religion. The Muslim upholds his religion and the Christian upholds his, because religion represents the right and sound way. If we listen to them today telling us from Damascus that they consider our adherence to religion tantamount to our adherence to rotten religious ideas, we pride ourselves on that. We pride ourselves on the fact that since the first day of our Revolution we have adhered to religion. Not only the Revolution leaders, but the people as well. It is the great secret behind the success of this Revolution: the adherence to religion.¹⁸¹

Nasser's conception of Islam, as we have seen, is reformist and modernistic. He seeks to fit Islam to modern life. In the manner of Mohammed Abduh, Nasser, holds an optimistic outlook upon life and he emphasizes the need for action. Aspirations and hopes cannot be realized, he told his followers in March 1965, by merely relying upon God's help. Sacrifices and persistence are essential. Islam

is a religion of struggle. "It is only the way of effort, only the way of work, which is the way for the realization of our hopes and aspirations, it is only the way of construction which is the way of salvation."¹⁸² Nasser's political activism is opposed to the thinking of Muslim apologists who speak of the inherent superiority of Islam and thus encourage a spirit of complacency.

And, yet, here again lies a dilemma. Modernists like Nasser feel constrained to point out past errors and outmoded elements in their own culture and to keep open the door to the West. They reject a mere romantizing of the Islamic past and they stress the need to accept Western ideas and techniques. At the same time, these modernists seek to hide the extent of their borrowing by asserting that the borrowed elements are actually of Muslim origin or at least a logical development of Muslim elements correctly interpreted. They strive to preserve self-respect and to overcome their sense of inferiority when confronted with the obviously superior power of the West by praising the accomplishments of their native civilization. They encourage pride in the Islamic past which becomes a warranty of a glorious future. The result of this dualistic set of orientations is intellectual confusion and strain that affects Arab attitudes to the West as well as toward their own history. The decay of the once flourishing Muslim civilization and the weaknesses of today's Muslim world have to be admitted, but, as Professor von Grunebaum phrases the problem, on whom is the guilt for the predicament of the present to be placed:

Was it the theologians of the Middle Ages whose distortion of the Prophetic message caused the drying up of the Islamic inspiration? Was it the Mamluks whose ruthless rule sapped the strength of Egypt beyond recovery? Or was it Muhammad 'Ali whose precipitate steps toward Europeanisation did more harm than good by creating that psychological confusion that still lies at the bottom of the incessant political unrest of the country? There is no end of questions of this order and they are becoming more burning as it is less possible to brush them aside by pointing to colonialism as the root of all evil. And even if colonialism is impugned with the problem is only pushed back one step, for it would be difficult not to ask further: What was it that weakened the Muslim world to such an extent that it no longer could or would resist the intruder?¹⁸³

These questions are raised but the answers given often involve considerable self-deception. We Muslims, notes Anwar Sadat, "inherited a glorious torch that could have guided us to the road to justice, knowledge and peace. Why then did we become hungry, ignorant, sick and weak?" Because Western colonialists, in alliance with reactionary rulers and an ignorant priesthood, stole and hid the torch of the true religion which exists to improve human life.¹⁸⁴ This tendency to blame outsiders for present difficulties and past failures is widespread. Islamic civilization, argues a well-known Arab scholar,

did not destroy itself; its collapse must be traced to external factors: "the Tatar invasion which came like a flood devastating everything before it; the Ottoman Turkish invasion which ravished and robbed and then isolated itself...and the Western colonialist invasion which came to take the wealth of the land with its right hand and to cover the eyes of the people with dust with its left hand thus discouraging their spirits and misleading their minds."¹⁸⁵ These successive invasions resulted in the corruption of rulers, in a sense of indifference toward life and death on the part of Muslims, and in a wrong idea of religion. Islam itself has nothing to do with the present bad reality. Muslims, whom they understood their religion and as long as they adhered to it faithfully, were among the most advanced nations of the world. The Arabs, Dr. Husaini concluded, "must understand their history, heritage and religion in a true and profound manner in order to regain faith in themselves, in God, and in their great human resources, and regain the desire for recreating the glorious history of their civilization."¹⁸⁶

The impact of nomad barbarism upon the development of Islamic civilization should not be slighted. Western Europe was free from this scourge from around the year 1000 on, and had the Mongols, for example, succeeded in overrunning Italy, France and Germany there would not have been a renaissance and Western science might have been retarded by centuries.¹⁸⁷ But devastating invasions and economic decline alone are not the only factors accounting for Muslim backwardness; the very character of Islam is also involved. Whereas Christianity grew up within the framework of a pagan world possessed of a rich literature, philosophy, science, law and art of outstanding quality--a culture permeated by a rational and secular spirit with which Christianity eventually had to come to terms--Islam arose in an illiterate tribal society without a developed culture and with no secular tradition. The learned doctors of Islam devoted their lives to the study of the Koran and the commentaries on it, and, with the exception of medicine, they always distrusted the cultivation of science. Islam, for a while, undertook the study of Greek logic and metaphysics and Arabic civilization from about 800 to 1200 A.D. led the world in most departments of knowledge. But philosophy came to be identified with the Ismaili heresy with the result that "heresy and philosophy fell together."¹⁸⁸ The progress of secular knowledge was slowly stifled by theological orthodoxy. Whereas the West, in part stimulated by contact with the Arabic culture of Spain and Sicily, was advancing in wealth and knowledge, Islam after 1200 was stagnating. The European renaissance injected a further dynamic element into Western civilization but the Arabs and Ottomans lagged further and further behind. "Islam had discovered God: it felt no need to discover Man and the World."¹⁸⁹

The backwardness of the Muslim peoples in science and technology is thus in considerable measure a result of the predominance of theology and of an all-embracing religious law and to the absence of a rival secular tradition strong enough to challenge the ulama. Orthodox Islam knows no distinction between church and state and it therefore never experienced

the European struggle between sacerdotium and imperium that contributed so importantly to political and intellectual liberty in the West. It is the failure to recognize that Islam itself is the underlying cause of many of the social ills afflicting the contemporary Arab world that stands in the way of a thoroughgoing restructuring of life and ideas.

Of course, obstacles on the course of modernization are created not only by the lack of intellectual incisiveness on the part of the ruling elite, but at least as importantly, by the continuing strength shown by the Islamic ethos among the masses of the people. The very fact, notes one observer, that those in power feel the need to invoke for the justification of both Arab nationalism and Arab socialism Islamic ideas "indicates the extent to which their assessment of popular opinion has led them to conclude that the Arab Islamic past is far from having spent its force."¹⁹⁰ Among the poorer classes, in particular, religious elements quietly endure. The fellahin, the rural proletariat of Egypt who constitute about two thirds of the total population, still live a life of isolation; reform measures bringing health centers and schools have not yet been able to break down traditional behavior. In 1966, 70 per cent of the Egyptian population was illiterate.¹⁹¹ Interviews conducted in 1957 among rural families who had benefitted from land reform revealed that 86% were illiterate, 63% preferred large families and 83% had never even heard of birth control. 98% of the men insisted on their religious and legal right to divorce a wife.¹⁹² The passions and emotional needs of the masses of the population are still tied to Islam. Unlike the guilds, the Sufi orders, though weakened, have not yet disappeared. Offering spiritual and material brotherhood and security in their ranks, they continue to appeal to men craving for a dynamic Islamic alternative to the official trade unions or the Arab Socialist Union.¹⁹³ The same factors account for the survival of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Following the attempted assassination of President Nasser in 1954 the Brotherhood had been outlawed and its leaders imprisoned or executed. Many of the rank and file had been jailed without trial. By 1961 many of these men had completed their sentences or had been released as a result of amnesties, and the secret apparatus of the Society was regrouping. Money, it appears, was being supplied from branches of the Brotherhood in Syria, the Sudan and other Arab countries. In August 1965 a new plot against Nasser was uncovered and more than a thousand Brethren were arrested. Among the accused ringleaders was Sayed Qutb, a prolific author often regarded as the theoretician and philosopher of the Brotherhood, who had called in his writings for the establishment of a truly Islamic society. The problems created by modernization, Qutb had written in 1962, were the result of deviating from Islam. What was needed were not more books, films and lectures on Islam but the desire to take Islam as charter and law.¹⁹⁴ He was now accused of conspiring to seize power in order to implement these ideas,

In late August 1966 sentences were passed upon the accused plotters. Hodeiby, the former Supreme Guide of the Society, and other leaders released during earlier amnesties were once more given prison terms ranging from three years to life. Seven members of the so-called Sayed Qutb group were condemned to death. The death sentences of three men were commuted by Nasser to life imprisonment; four men, including Qutb, were executed on August 29, 1966.¹⁹⁵ By November 1967 the regime felt secure enough to announce the release of 1000 imprisoned brethren,¹⁹⁶ but members of the Society living abroad concede only the loss of a battle and not of the war. Said Ramadan, director of the Islamic Center in Geneva (Switzerland) and editor of a monthly journal, al-Muslimun, told a correspondent of Die Weltwoche of Zurich that the Brotherhood still had two million secret members in Egypt. "Colonel Nasser is secularizing Egypt and thereby opening the doors wide to atheism and Communism. He is persecuting religion, killing our brothers." Eventually Nasser will fall. "Tomorrow, the day after tomorrow whenever it pleases God."¹⁹⁷

Unless the Muslim Brotherhood can regain its influence in the armed forces it seems unlikely that the Society can overthrow Nasser. The ruling officers, as we have seen, have been quite successful in appropriating the Islamic ethos. Islam, even for Westernized intellectuals, is part of the national heritage and the regime is careful to nourish this sentiment. The Muslim religion serves as the basis for minimum agreement between the members of the political community and it will continue to serve in this capacity until a new and secular formula for legitimacy can evolve and find acceptance.¹⁹⁸ Meanwhile, a confusion of norms will prevail. The task of nation-building within the framework of Islam will be difficult for Muslims have never successfully developed a realistic theory of the state. The original Muslim state under the so-called "Rightly guided Caliphs" cannot be resurrected nor would the system fit the Arab nation states of the twentieth century. During the thirteen hundred years of Islamic civilization, as Morroe Berger notes, "there was loyalty to family and religious community, perhaps even to profession or trade, but certainly not to the political unit of city or state."¹⁹⁹ A sense of citizenship was never born and the emergence of a modern state today is handicapped by the suspicion with which any central authority has always been viewed. Even though the fellah is more truly Egyptian than many political leaders, "he is still not conscious of belonging to a nation."²⁰⁰

The mobilization of mass support for the regime's goal of modernization and rapid social change as well as the search for a new source of legitimacy thus take place in an environment that is conducive to neither. The ruling officers are faced with a paradox: "the need to appeal to the 'Islamic Myth' of communal and cultural identity in order to work for the achievement of a new formula to supersede it."²⁰¹ Hence, the tie between modernization and legitimacy is cultivated as a crucial means of bridging the gap between reality and aspiration. A strong leader, endowed with charismatic qualities becomes the focus of loyalty and inspires his followers with an enthusiastic picture of

the nation's future. David Apter calls the fully developed form of such a system "mobilization regime." It relies on a "political religion" to bolster the legitimacy of the leadership. Such a regime he says, "represents the new puritanism. Progress is its faith. Industrialization is its vision. Harmony is its goal."²⁰²

The disruption of traditional patterns at a time when no new integrating force has yet fully emerged is hazardous. The resolution of rival and divergent views of the world is unlikely to be accomplished on the theoretical level and the adaptation of Islam to modernity will continue to defy consistency and philosophical neatness. A new kind of Islam, radically different from anything history has known so far, will probably be defined by practice and in the heat of action. It would be presumptuous to maintain that such a religion should no longer be called Islamic. "Throughout its history," notes John S. Badeau, "Islam has been in constant interplay with the processes of society and the result has been a working compromise between Muslim and non-Muslim elements that reflects the conditions of each era. To say that Islam is changing its role today is not necessarily to say that it is on the verge of disappearing--only that once more compromise is taking place, the final form of which cannot yet be determined."²⁰³

Notes

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174. The description of the activities of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs is based on a report issued by the Council and covering the years 1960-65 in The Islamic Pact: An Obvious Trick (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 136-148.
175. Muslim World LVII (1967), 247. It must be added that as long as the Egyptian peasant has to work the land with primitive tools he will have an economic incentive to make his family as large as possible.

Until the mechanization of agriculture any program of birth control thus will face many obstacles that have nothing to do with religious dogmatism. A doctor in charge of one of the rural social centers told Chalres Issawi "that the number of peasants who consulted him on means of having more children was if anything larger than that of those who wished to limit their number" (Egypt in Revolution, 302). See also John Marlowe, Four Aspects of Egypt (London, 1966), pp. 262-263.

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