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chapter 5

Struggling for Islamic Renewal

"Let's Elect Copts!" exclaimed Fahmy Huwaidy in his article on the 2000 electoral campaign for the People's Assembly. This call from Egypt's most prominent Islamist journalist to support Christian candidates for parliament was striking in itself. For those who recalled seeing the headline and the article before, the effect was even stronger.[1] Huwaidy had issued the same call five years earlier during the 1995 elections. With his slogan, he drew attention to the fact that in all of Egypt only thirteen Copts had received nominations for the 1995 round of national elections. The ruling National Democratic Party failed to name even a single Coptic candidate for parliament. The Muslim Brothers matched the regime's shortsightedness. The opposition Labor Party, known for its strong Islamist sentiments, offered to nominate a Copt together with their candidate from the same district, Mamun al Hudaiby, a leading Brotherhood figure. Hudaiby declined. Huwaidy warned that a critical fault line along religious lines had opened up, and that neither the regime nor civil society, including its Islamist wing, had responded effectively to this threat to national unity. In a bold gesture, the newspaper *al Wafd* reprinted Huwaidy's article of 1995 to signal that the country's major political and civic institutions had made no progress on this critical national issue five years later.

The New Islamist School took the unambiguous position that Islam, rightly understood, provides for the full participation of non-Muslims as citizens of an Islamic community. Egyptians as a people, the New Islamists argued, are made up of both Muslims and Copts, who are the joint heirs of an incomparable shared history and culture. They must be fully equal as citizens. In advancing this position, the New Islamists regularly condemned the Islamic extremists who filled the air with poisonous attacks on the Copts. Huwaidy's argument in the context of the parliamentary elections went even further. He pointed out that not all the venom directed

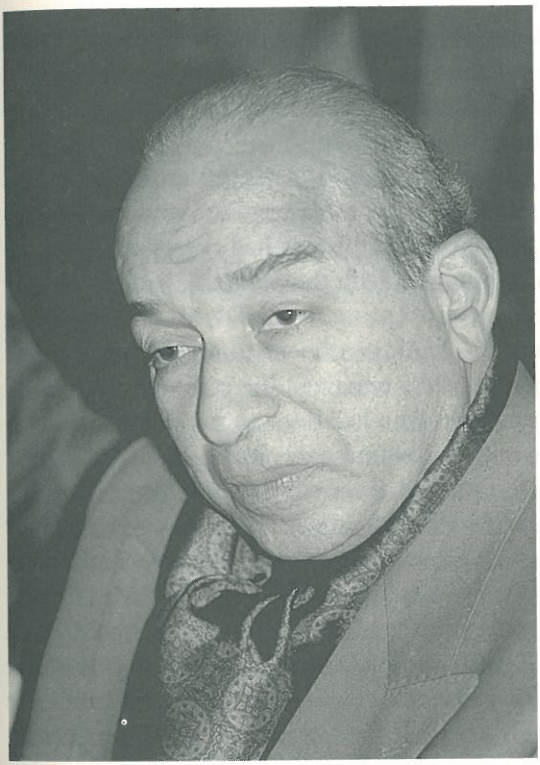
against Egypt's Christians came from militant Islamist quarters—that some Muslim electoral candidates having no affiliations with activist Islamist groups of any kind "themselves crossed the red lines." They used unjust and spurious arguments to claim that non-Muslims did not have the right to exercise leadership over Muslims. It was imperative, Huwaidy stated, to "mobilize the energies of reason and correct belief to counter such false assertions and restore the authentic image of Islam."[2]

To Huwaidy's consternation, the official National Democratic Party (NDP) itself was responsible for one of the most shameful incidents. It was like a "mined message," commented Huwaidy, "that exploded in my face as soon as I opened it." An unidentified reader sent him the offending pamphlet. It came with a brief note, asking "How do you like this?" The pamphlet baldly declared, "Those who elect atheists are atheists." This pernicious sentence echoed the extremist Islamist position that Copts and those Muslims who supported them for leadership roles were non-believers. By this argument, Muslims were dissuaded from voting for Coptic candidates.

Huwaidy admitted that at first glance he assumed an Islamist militant or perhaps even agents that sought to distort the Islamic Trend's image had issued the offending pamphlet. "But I did not believe my own eyes," he reported, "when I realized that the pamphlet came from one of the major figures in the ruling party." The candidate promoting himself in this deplorable way turned out to be an important NDP figure whose constituency was in the heart of Cairo. The phrase was not the thoughtless lapse of an ignorant supporter, nor a whispered private indiscretion, nor a gaffe in an electoral speech. Printed and widely distributed, the pamphlet played an important role in an official NDP campaign. Huwaidy noted that it would be difficult to convince people, especially Copts, that this influential figure nominated by the party represented only himself in using these divisive tactics. He concluded that Egyptians should not "be silent about electoral campaigns that violate the supreme interests of the nation in this way."[3]

Huwaidy's message in both 1995 and 2000 was that the government's mishandling of the parliamentary elections signaled a more general political breakdown, marked by political incompetence and ever more insistent reliance on repression. On the Coptic question specifically, Huwaidy made the explicit suggestion that "society" step in to make up for this failure. He called for direct, democratic action by Egypt's ordinary citizens over the heads of all political parties and bypassing the vulnerable institutions of civil society.

"If I were in charge," commented Huwaidy, "I would call for electing all Coptic candidates, whatever their political affiliations or even their policy positions." During this difficult period, major New Islamist figures, includ-



Fahmy Huwaidy, a weekly columnist for *al Ahram* newspaper and Egypt's most prominent Islamist journalist. (photograph courtesy of Abul Ela Mady)

ing Muhammad al Ghazzaly, Yusuf al Qaradawy, and Selim al Awa, along with other prominent Islamist intellectuals, published a clear and forceful statement in *al Shaab* affirming the sound basis in *Sharia* for Muslims to elect non-Muslims as their representatives.[4] In Huwaidy's view, electing Copts had become "an urgent national task" in order to affirm that Egypt's Christians are "an integral part of the fabric of our society."

Huwaidy, of course, understood full well that the government had, for the past fifteen years, shamelessly manipulated elections in Egypt. He also knew that mass attitudes among Muslims toward Copts had deteriorated. In the face of these dispiriting realities, Huwaidy appealed to the best in Egyptians, urging ordinary citizens to make their votes a symbolic gesture toward justice for the Copts and a politics of full equality between Muslims and Christians. Huwaidy understood that the attainment of this goal lay in a future beyond the current political practices and existing civil society.

Nevertheless, such a politics was worth acting for now. Huwaidy concluded by writing, "Although I'm not good at demonstrating and have not joined a demonstration for a quarter of a century, I'm tempted to call for a demonstration carrying the banner 'let's elect Copts.'"

The reprint of Huwaidy's courageous and insightful article generated more than an echo. In the year 2000 there was a response, and it came in a form remarkably close to the hopes that Huwaidy had expressed. It was almost as if a film director, disappointed with the first take, had revised the scenario and refilmed that scene of the prominent NDP Muslim candidate who sought to manipulate anti-Coptic sentiment to secure his election. The setting and the cast of characters remained the same. In the second take, however, the Coptic candidate, who had been opposed in such a dangerous and underhanded way, was resoundingly elected against the NDP incumbent. The energy for the reversal, it should be noted, came from below in the form of direct action by citizens rather than from government or civil society institutions, just as Huwaidy had imagined. The election results dramatically affirmed the democratic cooperation of the Muslim and Coptic citizens of one Cairo neighborhood in order to defend their rights. The sequence ended in 2000 with a real-life shot of "all the people of the district, children and adults, Muslims and Christians, pouring into the streets to express their happiness with the election of the Coptic candidate."[5]

Initially, it appeared that this positive experience of one Cairo district would not be the only indicator of progress registered during the 2000 parliamentary elections. Just as promising was the decision that the judiciary would monitor voting. To accommodate judicial oversight, the voting process was extended from one to three stages, with different districts voting on successive days, so that monitors could be present in all districts. Reports on the first stage indicated that the monitors' role significantly reduced abuses. As a result, the votes for the ruling NDP party declined. This signal was not lost on the regime.[6] The government found ways to go around the monitoring. Reports documented the manipulation of outcomes by busing government employees to the voting booths, as well as outright bullying of opposition supporters. The regime targeted the Muslim Brotherhood in particular, in this way revealing the official assessment of the balance of forces on the political street. In the months prior to the elections, there had been widespread arrests of Brotherhood figures. The worst instances of forceful intimidation during the elections took place in those areas where the Brothers ran candidates.[7] The regime succeeded in slowing the pace with which the NDP lost ground by reverting to its well-established repressive patterns.

In the end, however, the NDP still lost its majority. This erosion of NDP support sent the first of three clear signals on the meaning of the 2000 elections. There could be no doubt that the turn away from the ruling party validated the assessments of widespread political disaffection with the official political system. The victory of sixteen Brotherhood candidates carried the second message. It meant that the Muslim Brothers had become the largest opposition bloc, though still only a handful against an overwhelming NDP majority. The third sign from the electoral results, however, eclipsed the importance of both the NDP's decline and the Brotherhood's gains. The real winners in the elections were those candidates who carried no party affiliations at all and ran as independents. "The party of independents," claimed some analysts, "has become the largest party in Egypt." Others explained that this success of the independents indicated dissatisfaction with existing parties and a trend toward emphasizing the character and record of candidates, rather than their party affiliation.[8]

Post-2000 election developments only reinforced that sense of alienation from official politics. Real power lay with the executive, which, for all the talk of democratization, continued to rule by a system of emergency laws that relied on authoritarian control of the army and police. Understanding that no parliament could contradict these power fundamentals, a large number of independents announced a post-election shift of party affiliation to give the official NDP its usual overwhelming majority. Some were candidates who had lost the NDP endorsement, while others were genuine independents. They all recognized that only a People's Assembly with an NDP majority would be seated, and therefore they joined the NDP fold. Egypt thus had a dominant party incapable of mobilizing independent political support. At the same time, the country was also lacking opposition parties that could mount even a token challenge.[9] The only sign of independent political life came from the Islamic wave, represented politically by the Muslim Brothers.

Such a pallid political system held little attraction for those, like the New Islamists, with an interest in the kind of broad social and cultural transformation called for by their contemporary Islamic vision of gradual and democratic change. The New Islamists stood against those elements within the Islamic wave that sought to give political activity primary emphasis. In their view, there were few serious lessons in democracy to be learned in such an undemocratic political arena. In Egypt real power, they understood, flowed through other channels, inaccessible to democratic challenge. Therefore, an emphasis on political means would lead away from the fundamental democratization of social life in which the New Islamists were interested. It would inevitably rely on other, undemocratic means

necessary to contest official power, notably violence and ultimately the idea of a coup to bring Islam to power. The New Islamists understood that in such a confrontation the center, and centrists like themselves, would be the first target. "If Islam were to come to power by force," wrote Selim al Awa, "it would be far worse than the current situation. Those who are in power today are in dialogue with us, which is far better than being slaughtered in the name of Islam."[10]

In place of a political orientation, the New Islamists have devoted their primary efforts to the *tarshid* [guidance] of the Islamic wave as a broad social force with far greater promise as both locus and agent of peaceful social change. The first task, by these lights, would be the transformation of the movement itself in line with the inspiration of the *Wassatteyya*. In this approach, the Islamic wave would be the primary object of attention and the place where anticipated changes would take place first. The second requirement would be to make the transformed *Wassatteyya* a core constituent element of a proposed centrist politics on Islamic ground. For today, the New Islamists encourage young Islamists especially to engage in constructive social action in whatever spheres open up to them, rather than placing any great hopes in the existing political order. For tomorrow, the New Islamists argue that the best hope for a better politics depends on the strengthening over the long term of a broad political mainstream drawn from the major social forces. That mainstream, in their view, must in turn articulate an inclusive, centrist national project that could galvanize real political action. Their long-term vision conveys a clear sense of the contributions that the Islamic *Wassatteyya* can make to the emergence of this mainstream, but never loses sight of the necessity of a broader coalition of moderates from all major social and political forces as the basis for a new politics.

The *Fiqh* of Texts: Justice and Democracy in an Islamic Framework

The New Islamists argue that a democratic politics, founded on commitments to independence and reform and set within an Islamic framework, holds the greatest promise of fulfilling the needs of the nation. They address their brief for democracy in the first instance to the Islamic wave, but intend it for a broader national audience as well. The essential New Islamist argument links democracy to the core Islamic value of justice. "Tell me where you are as far as justice is concerned," pronounced Fahmy Huwaidy, "and I'll tell you where you are as far as Islam is concerned."[11] Their bold *ijtihad* [effort of interpretation of the sacred texts] reaches the general conclusion that Islam establishes the realization of justice as the

prime purpose of a political system. The degree to which justice is achieved in turn represents the appropriate standard for its evaluation. In the light of Islam, explains Huwaidy, justice is "an absolute and not a relative value. It must be adhered to in all cases and under all conditions, against enemies as well as with allies."[12] He underscores the centrality of justice as the highest value by declaring that "even if the banner of Islam is held on high and its religious teachings adhered to but justice is not achieved, the message is emptied of content and the means have failed to achieve the ends."[13]

In the New Islamist view, democracy in modern times affords the best means to achieve justice.[14] The New Islamists note that the idea of democratic political means has its own distinctive place in Islam, anchored by the concept of *shura* [consultation] with the ruler. However, their stance toward democracy is not an apologetic one. They recognize that the world beyond Islam's borders, most importantly the West, has developed the most promising modern democratic mechanisms and has the richest experience with democratic political institutions. They urge the Islamic world to look both to the heritage and especially to the experience of others to develop democratic political systems suitable for the global age.

The New Islamists propound this centrality of democracy while at the same time frankly acknowledging the historical record and contemporary reality of the despotism of most regimes, and the extreme vulnerability of civil society in Egypt and throughout the Arab Islamic world. They are painfully aware of the stark contrast between an imagined democratic politics of Islamic inspiration and the long authoritarian experience of Arab Islamic countries. Despite the democratic promise of the Islamic notion of *shura,* they acknowledge that political tyranny came early to the Islamic world and continues to diminish its prospects.

In the face of these daunting historical realities, the New Islamists assert that the inspiration of Islam speaks afresh to each generation. They refuse to be bound by what they see as the regrettable political mistakes of earlier generations or, for that matter, of their contemporaries who have relied on authoritarian political alternatives. "The abandonment of *shura,*" wrote Yusuf al Qaradawy unequivocally, "was the first thing that harmed the Islamic nation." The virus of dictatorship from the Roman and Persian Empires infected Islamic rule, based on the consent of the people, when the Muslims copied the worst features of these systems.[15] The infection of tyranny took hold early and persisted with devastating consequences. Fahmy Huwaidy has pronounced long stretches of the subsequent political history of the Islamic world "a series of disasters in which only the names and places changed."[16] The genius of Islam historically found its expression in fields other than politics. Thus, the New Islamists have not hesitated to

challenge the usefulness of historical models from the Islamic world. For the most part, they remain equally unimpressed by the claims of contemporary regimes to represent Islamic models of democratic governance.[17] For positive guidance they turn instead to the histories of others, notably Westerners.

The New Islamist *ijtihad* of texts seeks to draw inspiration from the revelation rather than from the history of its abuse. Their reading of the texts develops the concept of *shura* as a means, provided for in the Quran and *Sunnah*, to achieve justice by rulership based on full participation and respect for the rights of people given to them by God. They identify these dimensions of the tradition as essential characteristics of any modern idea of democracy. Whether admonishing the regime, guiding the Islamic mainstream, or acting to contain the extremists, Huwaidy explained that the New Islamists aim to correct distorted ideas about Islam in order to bring this democratic reading of the legacy to the fore.

Islamic democracy in a form that responds to the needs of the age, they candidly acknowledge, is a project yet to be realized. The New Islamists, therefore, set their sights on the long-term task of laying the educational and cultural foundations for an Islamic politics that has justice as its core value and democracy as the vehicle for its realization. In particular, they argue that Islamic *fiqh* must appropriate the gains of Western political constitutional thought. Speaking with unembarrassed frankness, Muhammad al Ghazzaly pronounced Islamic constitutional *fiqh* to be "severely underdeveloped." He urged Islamic thinkers to borrow freely from Western democratic concepts and mechanisms. More precisely, the New Islamist School singled out the following notions as proven instruments of democratic rule that should be imitated: the separation of powers, multiple parties and competitive elections, constitutional guarantees of basic political freedoms such as speech and assembly protected by an independent judiciary, and limited terms for the highest offices. The New Islamists have worked to integrate these elements from the experience of others into a coherent theory and practice of Islamic democracy.

New Islamist theorizations have aimed for a democracy of just outcomes and not simply procedures. This position clearly precludes the uncritical imitation of the West. The New Islamists balance their appreciation for the nuts and bolts of Western democracies with a discriminating sense of their limitations, particularly in terms of the unjust outcomes that even the most advanced democracies tolerate. They draw particular attention to the destruction of values and culture by unbridled consumerism and the unacceptable disparities in material circumstances and life chances that characterize all of the Western democracies, especially the United States.

All of the key New Islamist figures have made substantial contributions to an impressive effort that has extended over the last three decades of the twentieth century to spell out the implications of these insights. With too few exceptions, observers outside the Islamic movement miss or underestimate the important innovations in political thinking that these efforts have produced. As Fahmy Huwaidy notes, most analysts of the Islamic wave, whether Egyptian or Western, direct their attention either to "the traditional face of the Islamic movement, represented by the Muslim Brothers, which dates from the twenties, or to the angry, subversive groups which emerged in the circumstances of the seventies, forming both al Jihad and the Islamic Group, as well as al Takfir wa al Higra, which then disappeared from the scene." Most of these researchers, Huwaidy points out, fail to survey the huge Islamic terrain beyond these narrow borders which saw "very important and very positive developments" in the post-Nasser era.[18]

At the heart of this new political thinking are the 1993 *fatwas* [religious opinions] of Yusuf al Qaradawy on pluralism and democracy. Qaradawy spoke for all the New Islamists when he unambiguously embraced political pluralism, including the competition of political parties. He explicitly rejected the contrary views of Hassan al Banna, founder of the Muslim Brothers. Reasoning by analogy, Qaradawy explained that Islam has no trouble tolerating diversity in *Sharia,* recognizing four major schools as authoritative, despite important differences among them. Clearly, Islam could, and should, value pluralism in the political sphere. With the same emphasis, Qaradawy took as a starting point the idea that the Islamic notion of *shura* with the ruler provided a secure conceptual anchor for contemporary efforts to build democracy. Again with the full support of the New Islamists as a school, Qaradawy unequivocally pronounced that *shura* was obligatory and not voluntary, as some within the Islamic wave contended. While the New Islamists do recognize the very general character of the concept of *shura,* noting, for example, that Islam allows the fulfillment of the obligation of *shura* in a variety of ways, their response is to regard this generality as enabling intellectual creativity in the elaboration of the meaning of such a concept today. In their own work, they put forward a strong argument for understanding *shura* in terms of the Western democratic mechanisms that are now part of the common heritage of humankind, inspiring democratic experiments around the world.[19]

Huwaidy comments that this critical *ijtihad* on pluralism and democracy has been willfully ignored. He notes that if even a minor figure from the contemporary *ulama* [Islamic scholars] denounces democracy and a multi-party system, his words become the subject of headlines and endless commentary by intellectuals in Egypt and abroad. However, when

"Dr. Yusuf al Qaradawy, a great Islamic scholar, issued his *fatwas*, his declarations fell on deaf ears." Wryly, Huwaidy adds that "those observers who rarely ignore anything related to Islam paid no attention to his declarations at all, leading one to believe that their intent must be to obscure the Islamic attitude toward freedom in general."[20]

Given his major platform in *al Ahram*, Fahmy Huwaidy has played a central role in efforts to bring elaborations of this new *fiqh* of politics to public attention. In two authoritative syntheses published at the beginning and the end of the 1990s, Huwaidy laid out the main lines of the democratic theory advanced by the New Islamists. In a concise and easily understood form, he specified the seven critical characteristics that New Islamist theorists agree a political system must have to meet the exacting Islamic standards of justice achieved through democracy.[21] The first specifies that legitimate authority rests with the people, who choose the ruler and have the right to remove him from power.[22] The second notes that society has responsibilities and duties that it exercises independently of any "call by the authorities or permission by the government."[23] The third, fourth, and fifth characteristics provide, respectively, for freedom as a right for all, equality of all citizens, and the explicit recognition of the rightful place of the "other," that is, the non-Muslim, as a full partner with Muslims in the just Islamic state. The sixth element of an Islamic political system understood in these terms makes any injustice *haram* [religiously forbidden] and its confrontation a duty of all citizens. Finally, the seventh characteristic recognizes *Sharia* as the source of legislation to which rulers as well as the people must yield. *Sharia* is understood by the New Islamists to derive from the divine injunctions of the Quran and the confirmed provisions of *Sunnah*. They also recognize the importance of *fiqh* in elaborating and explaining the applications of these injunctions, though they insist that *fiqh* is a fully human project, subject to criticism and refutation. This formulation that identifies *Sharia* as the source of legislation, the New Islamists explain, separates executive from legislative power and thereby creates the theoretical justification for constraints on the power of the executive.[24] Rulers, like all citizens, are themselves bound by the provisions of *Sharia*, and the legitimacy of their rule rests in part on fulfillment of their obligations to *Sharia*.

The New Islamists take these characteristics as a standard to assess whether and to what degree any particular political system, real or imagined, meets the Islamic standard of a democratic order that strives for justice. This measure is addressed, in the first instance, to the Islamic movement. For the activists of the Islamic wave, this normative theorizing makes the fundamental point that the simple acquisition of power cannot

be the aim of the Islamic Awakening. The critical issue is the purpose for which power is used. The capacity to make and insist on this distinction sets the New Islamists apart. Others in the Islamic wave, especially those identified with "political Islam," too often succumb to the temptation to celebrate any wielding of political power by forces that identify themselves as Islamist, whatever the actual character of their rule. In important ways, the specter of "political Islam" drives the corrective work of the New Islamist School. To traditionalists and extremists alike who adopt this attitude, the New Islamists argue that injustice and tyranny, however they are cloaked in historical Islamic forms or legitimized by angry Islamic slogans, remain injustice and tyranny. They maintain that Islamic justice must define the purposes of power to be achieved through a patient process of cultural transformation that lays the basis for a democratic politics, rather than a sudden seizure of power.

Political Islam represents a direct threat to the attainment of this long-term goal. In some ways, it is even more damaging than the government's blockage of democratic advance. In insistent terms, advocates of political Islam call for *hakameyyet Allah* [God's rule], using this evocative phrase to justify rash bids for power. The extremists formulate the call in the strongest terms, but it also echoes in the words of traditionalists and some elements of the Muslim Brotherhood. Often these diverse advocates of political Islam give a falsely legitimizing, historical aura to such claims with loose references to the caliphate system or *wilaya* [a historical and therefore not binding concept of rule]. They capture headlines with noisy denunciations of "Western" democracy and its competitive political parties, focusing public attention on the alternative "Islamic" forms of rule they advocate.[25] As a result, political Islam has a strong presence both as the dream of salvation by those Islamists who seek the political kingdom, and as the nightmare of secular critics who fear Islam in power. Whether dream or nightmare, its essential features are those of the theocratic state, with power in the hands of religious figures who claim exclusive right to speak for Islam.

The New Islamists confront this specter boldly. They warn its advocates that their dream would be a terrible nightmare, violating Islam's opposition to the very idea of a religious state. To its critics, they explain that their nightmare reflects only the narrow political dream of a minority, far from the broad civilizational project of the mainstream Islamic *Wassatteyya* for which they speak.

With unrelenting precision, the New Islamists expose on Islamic ground the mistakes in interpretation that yield the distortions of political Islam. Political thought in an Islamic context, they explain, draws on three

sources: texts, the interpretations of texts, and the historical experience of the Islamic community.[26] The specter of political Islam arises as an amalgam of these three elements, one that fails to distinguish among them and to understand their very different weight and authority. Political Islam relies, above all, on flawed or inappropriate historical models and questionable interpretations of texts.

The New Islamists state firmly that only texts, not particular interpretations or historical models, are authoritative. Moreover, they point out that those texts of Quran and *Sunnah* that relate to political rule are few in number and general in character, referring for the most part to values and purposes rather than means and structures. With this reasoning, they reach a strong conclusion: Islam, in their view, does not specify a particular system of governance, sanctified by text, to manage the use of power in human affairs. Political Islam asserts otherwise. It falsely advances particular models as "Islamic" in some universal sense. The New Islamists categorically reject these claims. In their view, all of the institutional specificities of the various concepts and models of political Islam derive essentially from interpretations, often seriously flawed, and particular histories, rather than texts. These include, in addition to political Islam's distorted understanding of *hakemeyya* [God's rule], its dangerous presumption of legitimate authoritarian rule by religious figures in a religious state, and its mistaken inclination to regard the caliphate or *wilaya* as models for such a system that are appropriate in modern times. To refute such ideas, the New Islamists argue first that Islam categorically rejects the sanctification of any such specific forms of political legitimation, leadership, or institutions. With intellectual authority few can match, the New Islamists go further to challenge all efforts to find an authoritative basis in Islam for absolutist and authoritarian political claims for any future project. Finally, they maintain that this age, like all others, must not be bound in political affairs either by earlier interpretations of texts or by the example of political arrangements adopted by previous generations. In their view, each age must have its own political *fiqh*. On this basis, they confidently assert their own new *fiqh* of politics, while challenging the faulty political claims of political Islam in clear and forceful terms.

"They are laughable illusions," wrote Shaikh Muhammad al Ghazzaly of the "strange religious figures" who dominate the dreams and nightmares of political Islam. Ghazzaly dismissed these images of "men in long beards and flowing robes, those inflated 'Imams' who would drive the country backwards by their preoccupation with issues irrelevant to life on earth, such as preaching on preparation for doomsday." He warned that "this is a terrible mistake," because in Islam there is no such thing as "men of reli-

gion" with a sanctified claim to rule. The extremist *amirs* [leaders of groups] do assert a claim to rule, and they base that claim on their allegedly superior understanding of Islam. Such a prospect, the New Islamists declare, should sound an alarm in all quarters. The New Islamists vigorously discredit the credentials of the extremist leaders to interpret Islam. However, their argument goes further: it challenges the very premise that scholars, even recognized scholars, should rule. Addressing this false claim from Islamic ground, Ghazzaly explains that there are indeed those specialized in the study of Quran and *Sunnah*. "These studies," however, "are just one part of the wider Islamic culture that includes endless arts and subjects." Moreover, the *ulama,* as Ghazzaly describes them, "are just a group of Muslims, neither above nor below any other group." He adds that those most trusted in understanding the texts never had key roles in building the Islamic state—that "in the golden ages of Islam the most highly regarded *faqihs* [an Islamic scholar, specially trained and recognized by peers as qualified to contribute to *fiqh*] were never candidates for ruling."[27]

Equally wrongheaded is political Islam's understanding of the call for *hakemeyya*. "It is unacceptable," declares the New Islamist manifesto, "to deprive Muslims of their political rights and responsibilities with the assertion that in an Islamic society 'rule is for God and not human beings.'" The New Islamists explain that the phrase actually means in both Quran and *Sunnah* that "the *values and principles* of Islam are God-given." As the New Islamist manifesto expresses it, "God's rule comes at the beginning and the end."[28] They interpret this phrase to mean that the Quran and *Sunnah* define the purposes for which power should be used "at the beginning" to inspire the effort to build a political system, and "at the end" to assess whether the system has in fact achieved justice as called for by Islam. Islam thus provides a larger moral framework on the basis of which a system of rule can be chosen and then assessed. It leaves to human beings the actual task of building a political system, selecting its leaders, and executing policies that meet people's particular needs and circumstances. It is up to each generation to accomplish these political tasks.

According to the New Islamists, the essential interpretive error of political Islam in its understanding of the concept of God's rule is the conflation of two issues that in Quran and *Sunnah* are kept separate. The first is the source of legislation, and the second is the basis for the obedience owed to the ruler. In Islam, they explain, legislation originates in revelation. *Sharia* has a divine character in those provisions that come directly from Quran and *Sunnah,* and both ruler and ruled are subject to these elements of *Sharia.* In contrast, the legitimacy of the ruler and of the political system itself in an Islamic society "depends on the consent of the people, meaning

that Islamic government is a civil and not a religious government."[29] It is unacceptable to extend the rightful recognition of the divine character of *Sharia* as derived from Quran and *Sunnah* to the very different issues of the claims to rule by a particular political regime and leadership. The New Islamists believe that Islam, with no ambiguity at all, leaves these issues of rulership to the exercise of human discretion.

The New Islamists are not dissuaded by the fact that this confusion between the divine basis of legislative as opposed to executive authority has deep historical roots; they acknowledge that it can be traced back to the reign of the fourth caliph. Moreover, they are unmoved that the most important contemporary theorists of political Islam, including both Abul Ala al Maududi and Sayyid Qutb, have aggressively reasserted this confusion. "Rule is but for God" and "He is the Creator and the Ruler" are the two verses that have consistently been cited to blur the distinction between the divine basis for legislation, on the one hand, and the fully human claim to legitimate rule, on the other, in order to sanctify political authority generally. The New Islamists accept neither the authority of history nor that of interpreters from another time or place. They turn to the texts and offer their own readings. Kamal Abul Magd makes a strong argument that both of the texts usually cited to justify authoritarian rule refer only to the source of legislation or *Sharia* and not to the source of sovereignty. "Neither verse," states Abul Magd in unequivocal language, "has anything to do with the bases of political power."[30]

Adherents of political Islam often invoke historical references, notably to the caliphate, to buttress their misreading of the texts to legitimate authoritarian systems of rule. Models of politics from the first Islamic century (dated from the founding of the Islamic community in 622) are most often invoked, with such features as the lifelong mandate and unconstrained authority of the executive. The New Islamists readily acknowledge, as Selim al Awa expressed it, that "the era of the Prophet and the first four caliphs was the best time in which justice prevailed." However, in keeping with their core belief that each age has the right to its own *ijtihad,* Awa just as firmly rejected any implication that a caliph was therefore obligatory today. Instead, he pointed out that the caliphate of those first years was itself an *ijtihad* that changed and developed. "No detailed system is binding," wrote Awa, "unless it is chosen by the people who believe it achieves their aims and protects their interest; if not, they have the full right to change it." He noted that "prescriptions for the lifelong mandate of the caliph were written by *faqihs* according to their own times, but it is not a binding *Sharia* rule."

The New Islamists have likewise rejected the notion of rulership associated with the concept of *waliya.* This concept of rule is invoked by political

Islam almost as frequently as the caliphate to ground authoritarian political claims. Neither women nor non-Muslims, according to conventional interpretations of *waliya,* could assume rule. The concept is exploited today for exclusionist ends. The New Islamists reject all of these contemporary applications of the idea of *wilaya.* "I was asked by some young people," wrote Selim al Awa in the most thoughtful statement on the issue, "about the Islamic opinion on nominating and voting for Copts for the People's Assembly." The question arose, he explained, as a result of "the widely cited saying 'no command by non-Muslims over Muslims.'" They also asked him "about nominating and voting for women" because of their doubts arising from the *hadith* [a report, including the sources, of the words of the Prophet] that 'those who give authority to women fail.'" Awa's response to these inquiries, later published in *al Shaab,* was direct and unambiguous: "I said to them that both texts are used in the wrong context to prove something that has nothing to do with them." In an interpretation, endorsed explicitly by both Muhammad al Ghazzaly and Yusuf al Qaradawy, Awa bluntly declared that these restrictions on the political rights of women and non-Muslims derived from the obsolete concept of *waliya* and should be disregarded. Awa explained that the term refers to an absolute power to command and noted that the concept originally referred to the head of the Islamic state who had military and purely religious duties, notably leading prayers that were considered inappropriate for women or non-Muslims to perform. In Awa's view, none of these conditions can or should be met in contemporary political life. Therefore, in his judgment this historical concept is now irrelevant. "*Waliya* . . . no longer exists in any country," stated Awa. "The concept of government, its mechanisms and institutions have changed in such a way that today no one can be considered to have *waliya.*" In a memorable conclusion that underscored the link between the rejection of such antiquated authoritarian ideas and the New Islamist commitment to full political participation for all citizens, Awa advised the young people that "the proper criterion for accepting or rejecting candidates must be their qualifications to perform the consultative role, such as honesty, absence of corruption, and courage in facing evils." With strong emphasis, he added that "by these criteria Muslims and Copts are equal, as are men and women. The only permissible distinction is according to ethics, character, public record, and ability to support what is right and deter what is wrong."[31]

In line with this thinking, Awa put forward his own striking assessment of the meaning of the caliphate experience for the contemporary period. "If there is something to learn from this early age," he wrote, "it is that the caliphate was based on two pillars: first, the caliph was selected through *shura* among Muslims, with no particular group entitled to choose for the

nation as a whole; and second, the nominee chosen never assumed power without clear-cut support of the people." Translating these lessons into contemporary language, Awa concluded that "democracy is the best way to choose among rulers since human beings have so far found nothing better than direct elections," and he stated further that the mandate of elections should not be lifelong. "Good for the Americans that they limited the terms of the President to only two!" wrote Awa with a dramatic and unexpected flourish.[32]

The New Islamists acknowledge that the capacity for such *ijtihad* requires knowledge and understanding "in knowing God's rule that are not present in the majority of people." However, they explicitly condemn "raising this slogan on the tips of swords and insisting on it." They use this historical image to criticize authoritarian preemptions of the right of *ijtihad* in the political sphere as in all others. Such usurpations, they warn, "were, in our recent and remote past, a prelude for evil and injustice." Neither reason nor text, the New Islamists conclude, provide any acceptable justification for the monopoly of the right of political *ijtihad* by either a single ruler or a small group.[33] This stance carries the implication that competent scholars will have the task of *ijtihad,* with the results of their efforts subjected to democratic mechanisms of arbitration and choice.[34]

In place of the rigid and misleading certainties of political Islam, the New Islamists offer the tentative and contingent findings of their own interpretive project. Their work explores an open-ended way the prospects for attaining justice by democratic means in modern conditions. In Islam there are no ready-made models, sanctioned by God for all times and places, to achieve the standard of justice. In challenging the positions of political Islam, the New Islamists argue that their alternative interpretations represent not only a more accurate understanding of texts, but also a further development of mainstream Islamic political thought, particularly well suited to the needs of the global age. From the work of earlier Islamic thinkers, beginning with Afghany and Abduh and extending through al Banna to contemporary figures, they offer a selective reading that emphasizes democratic strands such as the struggle for freedom from external oppression, insistence on civil rather than religious governance, commitment to peaceful and gradualist reform, work for broad participation in political life, and the setting of meaningful limits on ruling power. These promising elements from the New Islamists' predecessors have contributed to their own collective *ijtihad* for the sake of an Islamic vision of a democratic politics that aspires to realize social justice. While highly conscious of the place of their work in the stream of Islamist political thought about justice and democracy, the New Islamists have developed their thinking with close at-

tention to the special political circumstances of their own time. Appreciative of the contributions of the founders of the *Wassatteyya* trend, the New Islamists nevertheless understood that theirs was wisdom for another time, that the last word on Islam and democracy in a global age could not be theirs. The new *fiqh* of texts developed in tandem with an equally important new *fiqh* of reality. The resulting realistic awareness by the New Islamists of their own situation and of the prospects of its democratic transcendence within an Islamic framework contributed greatly to the resilience of their political ideas in the changing and often adverse political circumstances of the last three decades of the twentieth century.

The *Fiqh* of Reality: Theorizing the Center

Historical context matters to the New Islamists. Political thinking, in their view, requires a *fiqh* of reality as much as a *fiqh* of texts, and they have developed a shared assessment of the most relevant dimensions of their historical situation. The New Islamist historical imagination directs attention first to the impact of the global wave of religious revival that reenergized the Islamic body in Egypt during the second half of the twentieth century. Second, they emphasize that Egypt's Islamic Awakening failed to generate an Islamist leadership fully able to respond to the opportunities that had been created. Finally, the New Islamists face squarely the authoritarian political context that constrains, but does not preclude, the intellectual and activist work of their school on behalf of the *Wassatteyya*. It is not simplifying the situation too much to say that the Islamic renewal sustains their hopes for a better future; the leadership void sets their essential task of educational and cultural reform; and the ebb and flow of authoritarian rule defines the terrain of their struggles. The New Islamists look initially for salvation to the "moderate heart" of the Islamic wave and then to other centrist social forces. Over the long term, they aim to translate their new *fiqh* of politics into reality by bringing the *Wassatteyya* into a broad national effort to create on Islamic ground a moderate politics of justice and democracy.

The New Islamists theorize and act within expansive boundaries of historical possibility. Over the last quarter of the twentieth century, these Islamist thinkers established themselves as important public figures who interact with all major social trends. In their commitments to social justice and democracy, they served as exemplary models for new generations of moderate activists. The extended time frame of their perspective allows them to avoid entrapment in a conception of political life limited by the unhappy prospects of both official politics and civil society in current con-

ditions of undemocratic rule. Their inclusive thinking starts from the premise that the centrist elements of all national major trends aim to realize the good of the nation, discoverable in recognizable, though varied, embodiments. They also believe that the moderate centers of all these social forces share a history of constructive interactions more important than their current divisions. From this perspective, the New Islamists see a history of past collaboration and a future of possible cooperation for a wide spectrum of moderates.

The gradualist political thinking of the New Islamists lays the groundwork for a future where the Islamic wave would be an integral part of the mainstream of Egyptian political life. They regard such a future as distant but reachable, and they work patiently for its realization as their first priority. The New Islamists stand firmly against the contrary and impatient strategy of political Islam that aims to capture targeted institutions of civil and political society. In this vision, these Islamist "islands" or "beachheads" would form the nuclei of an Islamic society to displace dominant arrangements, by force if necessary. The New Islamists explicitly reject these "infiltration" and "counter-society" models in favor of gradual, peaceful social and cultural change of the whole society.

To meet this challenge, the New Islamists cultivated a strong sense of "civilizational belonging" that saw Egypt as part of the Arab Islamic world. They defined that world in terms of its own intrinsic worth rather than in critical contrast to the West. Emerging from its own rich and distinctive Islamic roots, the civilization to which Egypt belonged had always interacted freely with the wider world and must continue to do so. In the New Islamist view, the remaking of Egypt would require the confidence to learn from all quarters, without, however, forgetting the distinctive Egyptian purposes of that learning. It would require the discriminating ability to return to Egypt's past without drowning in it. It would be essential to find in that past materials that would help to build new pathways to an evolving and very different future.

The New Islamists thus built their centrist position on solid Islamic ground without isolating Egyptians from the main currents of contemporary thought. This new thinking expressed the insights of the Islamic wave in theoretical ways that captured the essence of successful experiences, while responding with openness to the new conditions of the global age. In this way, the New Islamists' theoretical work on civilizational identity helped to provide an anchor for Egyptian efforts to create an autonomous path into the future in the face of potentially overwhelming hegemonic influences from the West. Its bedrock was the civilizational confidence that the Islamic wing of the national movement had preserved and the New

Islamists had refined. Its instrument was the rationalized Islamic wave as a component of the political mainstream. Its orienting strategy for the long term was the evolving national project to which the *Wassatteyya* aimed to contribute.

The importance of the New Islamist conception of civilizational identity was not restricted to the Islamic wave. The ability to cultivate a distinctive and confident identity, particularly among the young, was important to all trends. The balanced and sophisticated forms that the New Islamist thinkers gave these insights helped bring them to the mainstream of political life where they would be within reach of all groups. Such inclusive thinking about the civilizational identity of all Egyptians helped to overcome divisions, enabling moderates of all kinds to build coalitions and other forms of cooperation for their often courageous and always daunting efforts to act politically in an authoritarian political context.

Acting Politically

The New Islamists understand that young activists in particular need ways, however circumscribed, in which to develop political and civic skills. For that reason, these theorists of the center have kept themselves alert and open to all practical opportunities to act today for the new politics they imagine for tomorrow.

This emphasis on the cultivation of the young has elicited a surprisingly positive response for a "school" that controls neither a party apparatus nor, for that matter, any institutional structures at all. Young Egyptians have responded to the major New Islamist figures, especially Muhammad al Ghazzaly and Yusuf al Qaradawy, as they did to few others in public life. While it is possible to identify other important intellectuals who have identified with opposition political trends and played leadership roles in civil society, none have attracted as wide a following among the youth over so long a period.

Finding constructive outlets for the energies of activists has been a continuing challenge for the New Islamists. They never forget that the whole edifice of political and civic activity rests on the acquiescence of a government yet to be democratized. They see how deep the absence of values and mindless deference to authority goes in all the institutions of public life. They understand, moreover, that not all of these weaknesses can be attributed to authoritarianism. Opposition political parties that might provide an alternative for the new generation instead mirror many of the worst characteristics of the NDP. Year after year, the opposition parties grind out the same tired ideologies and platitudes, lacking in imagination and any

capacity for self-criticism. The same aging figures monopolize all key positions, blocking access by younger activists to leadership roles. Internal divisions and splits, most often based on personality issues, further weaken all the opposition parties. Many of these same failings mark the major organizations of civil society: their internal practices are often just as undemocratic as those of the parties, though there are some notable exceptions. However, the same petty internal squabbles, as well as preoccupation with minor issues, plague both sets of institutions. The Muslim Brotherhood enjoys more success than other groups in drawing young people to its ranks. Yet these same internal failings mar the Brotherhood organization, notably the disinclination to give meaningful organizational roles to young people.[35]

In the face of these obstacles, the New Islamists seek to guide youthful activist energies into whatever productive channels become available, provided they are consonant with the ends of political life they imagine. They aim to encourage even partial realizations of the larger dreams that the *Wassatteyya* embodies. Precisely because the New Islamists do not look to the government or even civil society with great expectations, they are able to take their measure accurately. They are adept at adapting to successive waves of repression, responding adroitly to periodic openings.

The decade of the 1980s offered many such positive opportunities. In retrospect, it is clear that during those years some of the most enduring roots of moderation took hold, especially important for the "lost generation." Practical experience was gained that bore fruit later. True, in the wake of the dismal elections of 1995 and 2000, it takes more and more imagination even to recall the optimism felt when Sadat's rule ended. Yet at that point Egypt did seem poised for a deepening of democratization that would include the Islamists. At just this historic juncture, the New Islamists drafted their manifesto and first advanced their claim for a leadership role as the "mind" of the *Wassatteyya*.[36] The New Islamists worked to provide *tarshid* for the efforts of the Islamic "body" in the civic and political spheres that were expanding in those promising years. They did so, moreover, in a balanced way that set them apart. They never pushed criticism of the regime so far as to question its authority. At the same time, they avoided too close an identification with a system of rule that in the end remained undemocratic.

The deepening of democracy never took place. By the late 1980s, any illusions about the character of the regime and the possibilities that it would reform began to fade. Selim al Awa in his unsparing *The Political and Constitutional Crisis in Egypt*, published in 1991, laid bare the absolute unwill-

ingness of the regime to respond to legal, judicial, and popular demands for any effective constraints on its power.[37] The New Islamists understood that although repression might periodically be lightened, the underlying government monopoly of real power would most likely continue for the immediate future. However, they did not find this political reality as debilitating as other social forces did. For them, this harsh political situation meant that the Islamic center must look beyond politics and even civil society. Their own most promising role, as the New Islamists saw it, was to rationalize the Islamic wave and make it an essential element of moderate social forces, drawn together from across the political spectrum and bridging the gap between Muslims and Copts. In the long run, they looked to these forces of moderation to create new political horizons of opportunity.

During the last years of Sadat's rule and the first of the new regime, Islamists established themselves in the faculty clubs of the universities, forged alliances with political parties, successfully published the important *Dawa* journal, and made themselves a dominant element in the professional associations. The most visible victories in the 1980s came in parliamentary elections. The Muslim Brothers cooperated first with the Wafd party in 1984 to win eight seats, and then in 1987 with the opposition Labor and Ahrar parties to win an unprecedented thirty-five seats in the Egyptian parliament. Supporters as well as critics came to respect the improved skills of the Islamist activists in playing the game of democratic politics, however they might differ in assessing their ultimate goals.

The New Islamists welcomed and carefully assessed this peaceful expansion of the activities of the Islamic body through democratic channels. In no sense did they control or direct these diverse and often spontaneous activities. Their role was rather to provide *tarshid* wherever and whenever possible. In the end, their experience in the middle-class professional associations with democratic elections and administrative responsibilities proved most valuable of all in enhancing the political skills of a new generation of moderates. Islamist activists in the numerous associations (for doctors, lawyers, teachers, veterinarians, and so forth) competed for leadership roles in compliance with democratic rules, accepting defeat and the circulation of power. They were instrumental in expanding the narrower professional functions of the associations to take positions on issues of public policy. The Islamists succeeded in enlarging the associational role in civil society, notably through forums and discussions sponsored by the professional associations that enliven Cairo's civic life. The Doctors' Association went furthest, expanding its social service efforts on behalf not just of doctors but of less privileged elements of the population in the interest

of social justice. On occasion, the Doctors' Association succeeded in doing so on a national scale, especially when the country was struck by some national disaster to which the association responded.

The New Islamists made their stabilizing and enlightening presence felt in these new forums, giving lectures and participating in public debates and discussions that gave Islamists the collective opportunity to assess their experience critically and reflect on its importance for the long term.[38] At the same time, the New Islamists demonstrated a willingness to criticize any lapses of behavior, particularly in those professional associations where the Islamists had a strong or even dominant presence and could therefore reasonably be held accountable for outcomes. The New Islamists did all they could to call attention to these lessons in applied democracy. They responded, for example, to an electoral failure of Islamists in the Veterinary Association with a blunt call to welcome the results of the ballot box. Islamic activists who complained of the outcome did not expect to be told that defeat in the elections most likely meant that they had failed their constituency and should work for self-improvement and reform. Selim al Awa delivered precisely this message. The Islamists in the Veterinary Association had initially won a landslide victory. However, after two years in office not a single candidate was reelected. Disgruntled, they approached Selim al Awa in his capacity as a lawyer with clear Islamist sympathies and asked him to handle a case charging fraud in the elections. Awa asked for all their records of their time in office. Reviewing the materials, he concluded that "during their term, they did absolutely nothing for their constituents aside from holding a number of religious symposiums on prayers, fasting, and so on." Awa told these Islamists that, given their record, their leaving office was a "good thing," and he refused to take their case.[39] This capacity to accept the discipline of democracy and to respond with positive self-criticism proved to be a distinctive characteristic of the activist Islamic wave, in no small part due to such guidance by the New Islamists.

The New Islamist School welcomed this work in the professional associations as an important "postgraduate" course in civic involvement for a whole generation of Islamists who were able to channel the activism of their university student days into these new democratic channels of civic engagement. However, they consistently registered the cautionary note that the associational realm, like other areas of civil society in Egypt, remained weak and vulnerable to government manipulation. Thus, the New Islamists resisted any exaggeration of the role the associations could play. Though they strongly supported Islamist activism in the associations, when the government crackdown and ultimate dismantling of the Islamist presence

came, the New Islamists were neither caught unawares nor provoked into making the issue one of confrontation with the regime.

The regime in the end reacted very negatively not only to these associational activities but also to all developments that suggested the Islamic body would thrive in a democratic environment. Beginning in the early 1990s, the government launched a systematic crackdown on civil society, with particular attention to curtailing the professional associations where the Islamists had registered such important gains. The decade of promise was over. Civic action in Egypt was besieged and faced with hurdles at every turn. Ironically, the promise from the first years of the new regime of a deepening of democracy and the rule of law found its only lasting expression in the use of the law as the major tool of repression. The government relied on its compliant parliamentary majority not only to renew endlessly the state-of-emergency laws but also to pass a whole series of laws that provided a highly articulated "legal" framework for repression.[40]

At the same time, the regime mobilized and encouraged a segment of the intellectual elite, notably those from the left who were visibly alarmed by exaggerated fears of the Islamist extremists, to support these measures against political democracy and a strong civil society. They did so in the name of protecting Egypt's "nascent democracy" from the Islamists. Systematically, the regime and its supporters dramatized the actions of the Islamic militants and exaggerated their impact. At the same time, they downplayed the positive contributions in theory and practice of the moderates. Most dramatically, the government sought to incapacitate the professional associations by legal measures that effectively undermined their governing boards.

Secular critics of the Islamists paved the way for the government repression by evoking hostile images to characterize the alleged intent of the Islamists in the associations. The liberals linked the important role of the Islamists in the associations to their work in other areas such as health care, social services, and the economy, giving the whole project of the Islamists in the associations a vaguely subversive coloration. Other elements of the left attacked even more aggressively. Images of Algeria and the Islamist violence there were regularly evoked in connection with Egypt's Islamists, with scant attention given either to the Algerian military's preemption of the democratic process or to the very different historical and social context. The left most often judged that the cultural, social, and humanitarian work of the Islamists in Egypt merely provided a cover for their underground political organizing, and a screen for their links to the violent radicals who they believed would be the storm troops of an Islamist fascist coup. The

evidence of democratic behavior in the associations, the left argued, was not really reassuring. In their eyes, democracy for the Islamists simply provided an alternative means to achieve their goal of the seizure of power. Evoking the rationale that the Algerian military had used to abort the democratic election of Islamists, extreme secularists in Egypt argued that if Islamists were to achieve power democratically in the national political arena, the first free election would be the last.

Two new laws, the first in 1993 and the second in 1995, turned these sentiments into new repressive realities by reformulating the rules for electing the governing boards of the associations. These antidemocratic laws had the clear intent of crippling the Islamists. As the government intended, none of the associations in which the Islamists had registered their gains proved able to hold elections in accordance with the new restrictive terms. The governing boards where Islamists dominated were dissolved and the associations were placed under legal custody, effectively losing their legal autonomy and their somewhat insulated status as institutions of civil society. The full force of this "legal" repression was felt in 1995 when leading Islamist syndicate figures, most notably Essam Eryan of the Doctors' Association, suffered arrest, trial, and sentencing by military courts to long and unjust prison terms.

Steeled by their larger sense of purpose that centered on the Islamic wave and their tough realism about the regime's limitations, the New Islamists displayed a self-assured resiliency in the face of these government assaults on political and civic freedoms, as well as lapses of good sense by elements of the Islamic wave. Their affirmative conviction of the intrinsic importance of their own work in the Islamic sphere, difficult though still possible, carried them through. They recognized that official repression had, by the late 1990s, reduced political and civic discourse to a desert. Yet they also saw that the sole exception was the Islamic trend, which, despite its lapses, had distinctive sources of energy and vitality that were beyond the reach of government repression. They knew that the Islamic trend could draw on the deep springs of faith of the majority of ordinary Egyptians, as part of the worldwide resurgence of religious commitment that had characterized the late modern world. Despite the regime's efforts to dry and despoil these springs, the New Islamists remained convinced that these attempts would fail. Historically, the sources of faith in Egypt run too deep. That did not mean, of course, that there was no corrective and nurturing work to be done. Lapses by Islamists could be serious and could have unfortunate consequences. Though the Islamic Awakening appeared to have the strength of a force of nature, the New Islamists clearly understood that it nevertheless required active attention and cultivation, a task

they judged far more important than the incessant parrying of government repression.[41]

This cautious optimism of the New Islamists periodically found vindication. Despite the apparent success of the regime's repressive moves, the impression that the Islamist experiment in the associations and other spheres of civil society was completely over by the mid-1990s proved deceptive. The Islamists once again displayed their resiliency. By the first years of the new century, Islamist activists showed signs of regaining some of their earlier momentum in the associations. The success of Muslim Brotherhood candidates in the 2000 elections to the People's Assembly was matched by their comeback in the associations, notably the Bar Association. In the 2001 elections to the Bar Association, the Islamists regained control in a major reversal.[42] The New Islamists responded with measured enthusiasm to these signs that once again Islamist activists could bring new energy to public life. They were encouraged by the fact that, among all the important trends, only the Islamists consistently succeeded in attracting youth and providing them with a sense of larger purpose, as well as various sites within which those purposes could be realized.

The New Islamist focus on the rationalization of the Islamic sphere alerted them to dangers to Islamic moderation other than government repression. At times, extremists from both Islamic and secular quarters proved even more dangerous to the moderate center occupied by the New Islamists than the authoritarian regime. The New Islamists regarded extremism of all kinds as a dangerous diversion for the Islamic movement and for the nation. At a time when there was serious work to be done, extremists often focused attention on minor personal and cultural issues and diverted energies into unproductive channels. The *fiqh* of priorities dictated that the "mind" of the Islamic movement should ignore or downplay these diversions, and keep attention on the long-term tasks of rationalizing the Islamic "body" and making it a part of the national center. However, the strategy of gradual social transformation required at a minimum a framework of public order. When radicalism of any kind threatened to undermine that precondition, the New Islamists overcame their reluctance to engage with what they regarded as peripheral issues. They responded to the destabilizing threat the extremists posed, most vigorously when radical actions jeopardized the emergence of a strengthened center.

From their centrist Islamist perspective, the New Islamists faced down extremists of all kinds. As Islamist intellectuals, they had a particularly important role in confronting Islamist extremism, as the events in Ain Shams in 1988 indicated.[43] However, the moderation of their own Islamist positions also enabled them to deal with the very different problem of secular

extremists. In some ways, the character of their commitments as Islamist centrists who spoke for the *Wassatteyya* stood out even more clearly when seen against the background of interactions with the secularists.

Unlike the Islamist radicals, the secular extremists did not resort to violence. The New Islamists never lost sight of this critical distinction. When Islamist radicals took up arms to advance their cause, the New Islamists did not hesitate to stand against them and with the regime, as the only force that could contain armed militants. In contrast, they understood that the secularist extremists mounted their attacks in the intellectual and ideological realms, to which they urged appropriate and proportional responses. Ideas, even the most distasteful and destructive ideas, were to be countered by better ideas, not by guns, and not even by the authority of the courts if that could be avoided.

In all of their interventions to counter extremism, the New Islamists acted to preserve a space for dialogue where the center could assert itself. For this reason, they opposed the cultural wars that raged in the final decade of the twentieth century, pitting extremist Islamists against militant secularists. Whenever possible, they distanced themselves from entanglement in these unproductive exchanges that focused on marginal issues. When they did take part in these cultural conflicts, they aimed to place the issues in the larger context of national needs and to reduce the vehemence of the exchanges. Clear patterns emerged in their actions. If Islamist extremists resorted to terror, they showed themselves willing to stand against them and with the forces of order. The New Islamists responded, for example, to the assassination of the secularist Farag Foda in 1992 with an unambiguous condemnation. Still, it was not always possible to avoid being drawn into the controversies around such deplorable incidents.[44] Shaikh Muhammad al Ghazzaly, for example, was called to testify as an expert on *Sharia* for the defense in the trial of Foda's murderers. He did so in a strict and unimpeachable way, but nevertheless he was vilified when his testimony was distorted in tendentious ways as a justification of the assassins.

Ghazzaly does bear some responsibility, however, for the uproar his testimony generated. Though technically correct, his final response on punishment for those who take it upon themselves to punish an apostate was too brief and too insensitive to the context within which this narrow legal question was posed. Earlier in the court session, Ghazzaly did elaborate on the *fiqh* surrounding the issue of apostasy, and he did indicate clearly his own opinion. He could and should have done so as well on the issue of those who usurp authority. After all, what was at stake in the trial was precisely the fate of those accused of the murder of an alleged apostate, and such an elaboration would have been even more germane than the one he

offered on apostasy. Because he failed to take this opportunity, Ghazzaly made himself vulnerable to attack.

Just as the New Islamists deplored the violence that took the life of Farag Foda, so too they condemned the excessive and destructive zeal that disrupted the private life and destroyed the professional career of Nasr Abu Zeid, a young academic at Cairo University, who in 1993 was accused of apostasy for his interpretive work on Islamic discourse. Fahmy Huwaidy emphasized the dangerous consequences for an Islamic society of such ill-considered treatment of a scholar. He did not hesitate to say that the Islamists who brought the case against the researcher were just as bad as the government, which was threatening to imprison reporters whom they saw as expressing "contempt" for the ruling political system. "Both of these elements," Huwaidy wrote, "refuse to cope with difference of opinion; they deny the value of dialogue and work to decrease the space of tolerance."[45]

The threats to the tolerant center, however, arose not only from misguided young militants who sought to define a revolutionary political path for the Islamic wave. Exaggerated and intemperate responses by the Islamic wave to secular critics, especially the pointed attacks on the extreme secularists, threatened to undermine moderate purposes just as thoroughly. The New Islamists argued persuasively against viewing secularists as one undifferentiated group: they made important distinctions between moderate and extreme secularists. They defined the areas of potential cooperation with both groups, expansive in the first case and constrained in the second. The New Islamists never lost sight of the fact that even the most extreme secularists advanced their positions essentially on intellectual grounds, even though they were forced to acknowledge that those positions did provide the justification for government repression of the Islamic wave as a whole. Still, they held fast to the conviction that intellectual challenges could be safely met on intellectual grounds alone.

The New Islamists accepted with equanimity the reality that some of these disputes might not be resolved. They urged that these matters be put aside and attention focused instead on those areas where agreement made cooperation possible. After all, the New Islamists argued, the theorists and activists of the Islamic wave had a demanding agenda, and many of its elements had a more pressing importance. Resolution of the most intractable issues could be delayed, even repeatedly delayed, in order achieve progress in areas that held greater promise. It was critical to draw back from these engagements with extremists whenever possible in order to theorize and act for the center, both of the *Wassatteyya* and of the nation. The New Islamists believed that the best prospects for the nation rested with a moderate Islamic wave that would be part of the political mainstream. Quite

unexpectedly, a group of young activists, spearheaded by younger elements within the Muslim Brotherhood, appeared on the political scene in 1996 to give tangible if not fully realized expression to these hopes. This group countered even the most extreme secularist ideas with the calm and confident presentation of the viewpoints of the Islamic center, if possible in appropriate academic and intellectual forums.

In helping to neutralize extremists of all kinds, the New Islamists made substantial contributions to the strengthening of the hope for the emergence of a broad political mainstream. Whether dealing with the fringes of Islamist or of secular opinion, their aim was always to reassert the center, not only of the Islamic wave but also of the nation as a whole, in order to refocus attention on the task of building as inclusive a national community as possible.

Guiding the Next Generation: The Wassat Party Experience

The news came early in 1996, in the midst of an aggressive regime policy of "breaking arms" directed against the new forms of Islamist activism in the professional associations and other sites in civil society. Several members of the younger generation of the Muslim Brothers officially applied to found a political party, which they called the Wassat Party. They did so in cooperation with a small number of women and Copts, including Rafiq Habib, the son of a prominent priest.[46] Although the membership drew most heavily from the Brothers, the party differentiated itself as a civil party that included Muslims and Copts and sought to address the concerns of all Egyptians.[47] These young activists, of whom the engineer Abul Ela Mady was the most prominent, adhered to the path of peaceful change. Their guiding ideas bore the clear imprint of the political thinking that the New Islamists developed in the last quarter of the twentieth century.[48] The moderate message of justice and democracy had penetrated deeper than conventional views suggested.[49]

It is impossible to read the Wassat Party program without hearing, between the lines, the voices of the major New Islamist figures.[50] Theirs is not the only influence, of course, and in some important ways the document falls short from a New Islamist perspective. The new party aims to speak to both the older and the newer elements within the Brotherhood. The traditional thought of such past and current Brotherhood leaders as Omar Tilmisany and Muhammad Mashur left its expected traces in the document. At the same time, the young activists have responded to nationalist thinking coming from sources outside the Islamic wave, such as Muhammad Hassanein Haikal's Arab Nationalism and Nemat Fuad's sense of

Egypt's unique identity. Within this amalgam, however, the single most powerful source of intellectual inspiration, and the source that gives the platform its most original and distinctive features, comes from the New Islamists. Thus, commentators familiar with the work of the New Islamists could not have been surprised when the Wassat Party's founder, Abul Ela Mady, explicitly cited Kamal Abul Magd, Muhammad Selim al Awa, Fahmy Huwaidy, Yusuf al Qaradawy, and Tareq al Bishry, among other independent intellectuals, as major sources of guidance for the young activists who made the decision to form the party and took the lead in formulating its program.[51]

The Wassat Party's platform clearly shows how effectively these centrist Islamist intellectuals have conveyed to a new generation their insights on how civilizational Islam could respond to the contemporary needs of Egyptians.[52] Complex New Islamist concepts find expression in the party platform, not least in the core substantive notions of civilizational Islam and appreciation for the historical roots of the broad *Wassatteyya* trend that expresses it. In the clearest terms, the party platform states that the civilizational project "goes beyond religion and all artificial divisions." Islam is understood in terms broader than those of religion, and the platform makes the explicit point that the Islamic civilizational project embraces both constituent elements of the Egyptian national community, Copts and Muslims. "Everybody is called upon to join this project, which unifies groups without eliminating their differences," announces the document.[53] The young activists have absorbed both Qaradawy's view that Islam is broader than religion and Abul Magd's arguments that civilizational Islam provides the generous foundations for a pluralistic and inclusive national project. They explain that their "use of the term 'civilizational Islam' does not reject Islam as a religion; on the contrary, religion is part of it and adds to it." The slogan emerged from the effort to identify a referential context that represents everyone. The document adds that "Islam as a religion remains as such for those who believe in it; religion gives strength to Islam as a civilization. Islam as a religion represents the majority which preserves 'Islam as a civilization' that represents the unity of all."[54]

The party platform notes that this inclusive stance represents a break with the past, when Egyptians too often retreated into narrow and exclusivist "sub-affiliations marked by religious slogans and defense through devout acts." While understanding the defensive logic of this response that aims to protect the nation's religious sanctities, the Wassat group argues that their generation must pursue a different course that emphasizes "the pan-affiliations of Islam as civilization rather than the sub-affiliations of Islam as religion." Thus the distinctive thrust of New Islamist thinking

about civilizational Islam as a project for the future of the entire nation permeates the Wassat Party program. With Kamal Abul Magd, the Wassat youth argue that Islam as a civilization encourages an identity able to transcend fearful and reactive defensiveness and to inspire "work for progress and development" of the entire nation.

The confidence of the party program comes in part from the understanding that the Islamic civilizational project is an integrative one, as Qaradawy emphasized, that draws together the diverse strands of the Islamic wave. Above all, these young activists have understood the necessity, in the first instance, of reuniting the intellectual and activist wings of the Islamic wave. "In recent years," the party platform notes, "these elements were scattered and torn apart." Theory developed in its own separate sphere, while activism remained isolated from it. Selim al Awa in particular had frequently warned that one consequence of this split was that although "some people were convinced by the civilizational project, they doubted that it could ever be implemented."[55] Indicating that this lesson of the New Islamist *tarshid* had registered, the party program states that the task of the Wassat is to unite these two strands of thinking and activism. Such a combination of theory and practice, of mind and body, would "legitimate theory by connecting it to the masses and legitimate political action by making it the implementation of theory that aims for progress." Renaissance needs "a vision, renewal, and *ijtihad* as well as political action."[56]

The party platform also elaborates the rich connotations of the term *Wassatteyya,* as the Wassat circle has come to understand them. They recognize first that the concept finds its ultimate grounding, as Qaradawy has often explained, in the Quranic verse where God says "I made you a Wassat nation." This phrase is taken to mean that the Islamic civilization is a unique and independent one with an impressive will to survive. Neither minor nor marginal in world history, Islamic civilization has proved to be durable, with contributions still to be made.[57] In accents reminiscent of Kamal Abul Magd, the platform goes on to celebrate the "sophistication and balance" of Islamic civilization when compared to Western and Asian paradigms. With a pointed reference to the Native Americans decimated by colonization, the young activists state categorically that "as the children of this civilization, we will not allow its destruction."[58]

The name "Wassat," the platform also makes clear, is intended to invoke the venerable tradition of the *Wassatteyya* and its distinctively moderate understanding of the imperatives of Islamic reform. In explicit terms that again echo the arguments of the New Islamist manifesto, the platform affirms the understanding that moderation is "a direct expression of the nature of this nation." In this sense the *Wassatteyya* cannot be pushed

aside, for it speaks for what is most central in national life. Moderation, rather than being simply the opposite of extremism as a choice of means, is understood in the party platform "as a way of life." This means that moderation is "a commitment to legitimate means and a real desire to achieve progress through peaceful methods" that respect the integrity and unity of the country. The Wassat group thus explicitly commits itself to "struggling for a better future, but without dismantling society or doing harm to the nation's soul."[59]

Drawing on the work of Tareq al Bishry, the platform explains that the *Wassatteyya* strategy is to approach its tasks by first distinguishing between what is constant and what is changeable in the national heritage. The capacity to recognize and act on this distinction gives reformers the flexibility to make concessions in many secondary areas while preserving things that relate to the core of the nation. In the language of Fahmy Huwaidy, the Wassat circle affirms that this nation, like all others, has certain "sanctities" that cannot be compromised. At the same time, the party platform strenuously curbs the retrograde inclination to sanctify everything. In this way, it is possible to avoid a vision so tied to the past that neither progress nor development is possible. The past cannot be repeated, though the values that brought glory to past ages can be made to illuminate the pathways to the future. "For all nations there are some constant things or sanctities," the platform states, and these provide "the principles and values that frame behavior." At the same time, "there are also changeable things." In a call to creative intellectual and practical engagement that echoes the best work of Selim al Awa, the platform notes that the vast area of the changeable defines the arena of the "*ijtihad* of different generations" that "neither sacrifices the nation's identity nor falls into the trap of repeating past experiences."[60]

The Wassat platform notes finally that the *Wassatteyya* orientation does illuminate a distinctive civilizational path to the future, defining the relationship to both the heritage and the Western experience, while charging each generation to bear its responsibilities accordingly. "When we know the constant and the changeable, we know the road." This confident assertion means that "to alter the constant would be Westernization and self-destruction." Following Bishry's logic, the Western achievement should be considered "not with fascination" in its own terms but rather in the interest of preserving the values and principles of the heritage. "We have to sort it out," the Wassat group explains pragmatically, "in order to determine what we can and cannot use."[61]

These activists also offer a generational understanding of "Wassat" as signaling the special responsibilities of the middle generation. They grate-

fully acknowledge the work of the pioneers and willingly accept responsibility for those, notably university students, younger than themselves. At this stage, however, they believe that their own generation, the middle generation, has its own distinctive potential, having "absorbed the experience of previous generations while remaining sensitive to the challenges we face." The Wassat generation "is nearer to the future without being disconnected from the past." Therefore, the middle generation is positioned "to achieve the goals of the *Wassatteyya*" and has to "carry the torch and undertake its duties."[62]

Along with these elaborations of the central concepts of civilizational Islam and the *Wassatteyya,* the Wassat Party platform addresses specific social problems. It does so in ways that suggest how the experiments mounted by civilizational Islam, informed by the theoretical work of Islamist scholars, can place policy questions in the context of both the latest Islamist thinking and the most recent developments in the national and global community. Not surprisingly, education is given special emphasis and treatment in ways that show the influence of the sophisticated commentary on education developed by the New Islamists.[63]

In the platform, education is seen as the heart of a broad, forward-looking commitment to gradual and peaceful change. The platform calls for comprehensive reform, including the curriculum, teacher training, running of the schools, and the overall administration. More important, it sees these individual areas as elements of an inclusive Islamic civilizational vision that derives from a consensual national project that can provide the basis of what the young are taught and to what ends. In explicit terms, the generation of the Wassat Party see their efforts as directed to bringing together the thinking of Islamist intellectuals and the social work of the Islamic movement, with education at the center of that synthesis. Echoing all the major New Islamist themes, they call for attention in educational programs to the determination of the specific needs of Egyptian society and the ways in which educational programs can meet them. They are strong advocates both of updating the curriculum to meet the needs of a new age and of making the educational system the vehicle for fostering among the young religious values and commitment to a consensual national project within an Islamic framework.

Given this ambitious goal, the Wassat Party platform extends the notion of education in ways consistent with New Islamist thinking to the "meaning-producing" media. An entire section is devoted to a series of demands to make the national media a more effective educational instrument. In particular, the platform calls for the banning of advertisements that contradict society's values and promote foreign interests, as well as the prohi-

bition of media acceptance of foreign funding. It also advocates the removal of restrictions on the media, enabling it to confront the cultural hegemony of the foreign media and to represent all major social forces within the country. Finally, the platform calls for greater emphasis on Arabic as the language of the media and on the cultivation of creativity, especially among the young.

Although these sections on education of the Wassat Party platform show unmistakable imprints of New Islamist thinking, they also reveal just as clearly the ways in which the document, and indeed the party itself, should not be thought of too simplistically as either the work of the New Islamists or the culmination of their efforts. Very little of the profound New Islamist rethinking of the heritage finds its way into the discussion of the substance of the curriculum, apart from the emphasis on Arabic. The platform invokes the idea of the civilizational project but gives too little indication of its content. The rich body of scholarly work on inherited culture and its relevance to our age that the New Islamists have produced is scarcely tapped. The Wassat platform recognizes the imperative of national consensus for a comprehensive vision for the future, but conveys little of the sophisticated New Islamist understanding of the complex participatory social and political process that alone could produce such an outcome in a democratic way.

Instead, when it comes to implementation, the spirit of the Wassat Party platform draws more from the outmoded Muslim Brotherhood model of administrative and bureaucratic instruments that ultimately would have to be sanctioned by ruling power in order to achieve their ends. The platform's comments on the media and public education reflect very clearly the defensive, reactive, and "banning" approach of the Muslim Brothers, rather than the more open, liberal, and confident views of the New Islamists. The education section reads as though the only real problems in education stem from government censorship, corruption, and Western intrusions. Little real thought is given to the intellectual and moral challenges of educating young people in a world where the most powerful threat to the sense of community and to values more generally comes from the consumerist ideology and the impact of global market pressures which, unless confronted by powerful countervailing social and cultural pressures, adhere to no standards other than profit. Similarly, the sections on the role of women in society take the conservative stance that women's place is in the home, failing to build on the more progressive strands in New Islamist thinking. Yet for all these limitations, when contrasted with the exacting standard of the best of New Islamist thinking, the initiative of the young Wassat activists remained a bold and courageous step.

Consistent with the regime's strategy of repression and "drying the springs," the official committee with the power to license new parties lost no time in refusing to recognize the new party. To an Islamist party that explicitly refused violence, pledged its adherence to democratic participation, and included among its founding members important Coptic figures, the committee blandly responded that the Wassat Party was unnecessary because its platform contained "nothing new or distinctive."[64] The sensationalist magazine *Rose al Yusuf* almost immediately began to mobilize opinion hostile to the Islamic wave, with unsubstantiated charges that the initiative was a Brotherhood "conspiracy," with only a cosmetic Coptic "cover."[65] In the spring of 1996, security forces arrested three of the party leaders, along with thirteen members of the Muslim Brothers, as part of a repressive sweep against Islamist moderates.[66]

In sharp contrast to the government's reaction, some of the more independent critics writing about the Islamists recognized the important new features of the Wassat initiative. One particularly astute assessment signaled clearly that the "unfair" judgment by the government committee on parties overlooked the fact that the platform usefully "defined moderation not simply in opposition to extremism but rather substantively as the belief that concessions on the fundamentals would mean the destruction of the nation, while overreaction would mean drowning in the past." Just as important for this analyst was the fact that the Wassat Party distinguished itself by having a separate and prominent platform plank that reasserted the overriding importance of national unity between Muslims and Copts.[67]

The Islamist reaction proved the most interesting and least predictable. Although the press initially described the party initiative as the work of the Muslim Brothers, the leadership of the Brothers strongly attacked the new party and worked actively to undermine it. The aging leadership of the Brotherhood regarded the work of the young activists as a breach of discipline that threatened the bureaucratic and hierarchical organizational structure of the Brotherhood. They expelled the party founders for arrogance and disobedience that threatened to undermine the movement. They also instructed those members of the Brotherhood who had responded positively to the initiative to withdraw their support, whatever their personal relations with the founders, warning that this challenge to the regular authority structures would produce anarchy within the Brothers organization.[68] Even though the Wassat Party platform showed clear deference to the historical role and current importance of the Brotherhood, the Muslim Brothers still chose to disown their assertive offspring.

In sharp contrast, the New Islamists welcomed this bold initiative of the young as a sign of vitality and hope. In their public responses, they chose to

pay attention to the most progressive and forward-looking aspects of the party platform, taking them as hopeful signs that the Islamist body could act in moderate ways that fully engaged the energies and talents of the younger generation. Yusuf al Qaradawy lent the full weight of his prestige to support of the Wassat Party, sharply criticizing the Brotherhood leadership for its disavowal.[69] Kamal Abul Magd saw in the new party a contemporary affirmation of the powerful centrist current of moderation that had asserted itself from within the Islamic Awakening. Reading the initiative of the Wassat Party founders as a dissent from the rigidities of the Brotherhood organization, Abul Magd unequivocally identified with it. "The idea of moderation adopted by the Wassat youth," he wrote, "is precisely the same idea about which we were enthusiastic in the fifties." Referring to the hostile government response, he added that "regretfully, what is happening currently with the centrists is exactly what happened with the group of moderates in the fifties." Abul Magd explained that the moderates of that period had questioned whether the "thought" of the Muslim Brothers was adequate to the need for a comprehensive framework to present Islam to the world; the moderates' answer then, as now, was that it was not, and that other sources, beyond the framework of the Brotherhood experience and thought, would be needed.[70]

Muhammad Selim al Awa vigorously protested the unwarranted attack on the moderate activists in 1996 by the "storm of rejection and denunciation from the Islamic movement and other sides as well." He called on the Islamic movement, and civil society in general, to recognize and celebrate the "real intellectual development behind this action that pushed this Islamist group to go beyond the familiar frame of action for the Islamic movement in Egypt." As Awa described it, these young people, under the most difficult circumstances, "tried to found a party that would operate under a highly complicated and restrictive set of laws and regulations that govern all parties in Egypt except the ruling party."

Awa pronounced the initiative by the Wassat founders an "*ijtihad* of the youth" that deserved backing from Islamist activists and intellectuals. The experiment, if supported and allowed to go forward, would have given these young people "a chance to interact with the state institutions and laws to show the real truth about the scope of political freedom allowed to those who want to form a distinctive party that introduces a new project for the nation, built upon its fundamentals, but also taking into account changes in contemporary life." What happened, concluded Awa, was just the opposite in both activist Islamist and official circles. Egypt's youth suffered "yet another series of assaults."[71] In subsequent legal wrangles aimed at challenging the party committee ruling, Awa acted as lead attorney for

the Wassat Party, enlisting at one point the aid of the prominent Brotherhood thinker Taufiq al Shawy in an open conflict with the Brotherhood leadership over its treatment of the young activists.[72] Awa strongly criticized the Brotherhood leadership for cooperating with the government in the repression of political freedom.[73]

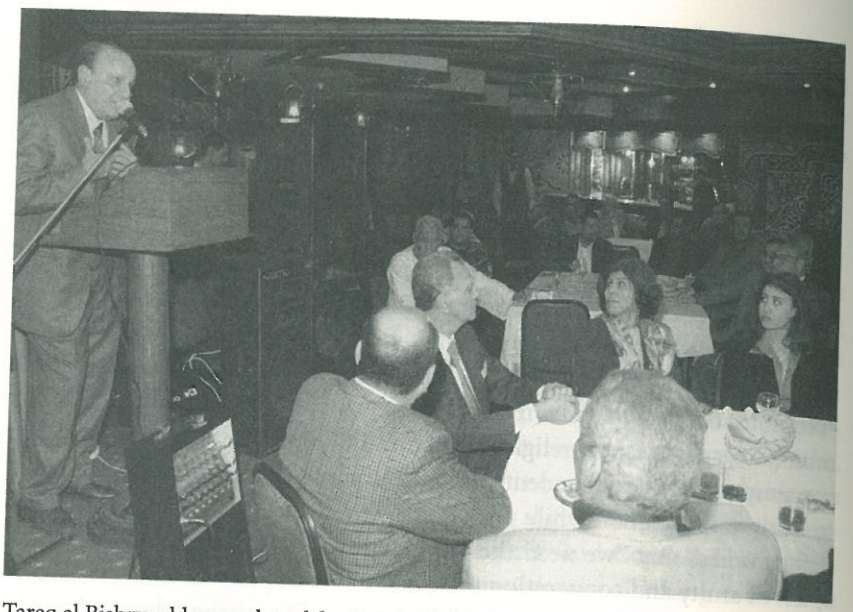
The Wassat circle responded to the setback with restraint, yet perseverance. They mounted two further applications for the party, using slightly different names. With each new application, they made amendments to the platform designed to show how their effort would broaden the existing range of political parties by introducing a moderate party that had civilizational Islam as its inspiration. Both applications were summarily denied, though the documents generated as part of this effort are important for the reaffirmation of the open and inclusive position that they take. The second application, for example, stated even more explicitly that it was an expression of the *Wassatteyya* trend.[74] The slightly larger group that endorsed this application contained both women and Copts.[75] The revised platform sounds the major themes of New Islamist thinking even more clearly and eloquently.[76] The core commitment to rethinking the heritage as the basis for political action is expressed as "a continuous *ijtihad*" that establishes "an effective relationship between the intellectual project of renewing Islamic civilization and political action." The party founders explicitly recognize their debt to "those generations of intellectuals who were working, away from distractions and political battles, on presenting the fundamentals of the heritage in a contemporary manner, leaving aside those elements that were not essential." Defining the role they hope to assume, the group announces that "these serious and continuous theoretical efforts were only in need of a movement to apply it." The mind-and-body notion of the New Islamists has clearly captured their imagination. They write optimistically that their movement "with God's help brings the embryo of the Islamic civilizational intellectual work into the world of action." Yet, as part of the genuine confidence that energizes their movement, the Wassat circle explicitly repudiates any totalitarian claims for their intellectual orientation or for the program they derive from it. In open and tolerant language that recalls such New Islamist figures as Selim al Awa or Kamal Abul Magd, they pronounce that "the supporters of this platform do not claim that they own the truth." Continuing in the same vein, the revised platform states that "what we introduce is just a human interpretation completely open for disagreement, amendment, and development because there is always a need for *ijtihad*, and our hearts and minds are ready to learn from anyone." This openness finds its most important political expression in the clearly stated intention to make the Wassat group part of a broader, inclusive national consensus. The revised platform announces a

hope "to reach a national consensus that answers the legitimate questions raised by the national forces which once doubted the motives of the Islamic renaissance movement." The aim is "to reach out to everyone to create a political environment where consensus increases and differences are reduced."[77]

Finally, the activists of the Wassat Party do not hesitate to claim that they speak for a renewed legacy that aims to make a serious contribution to the world. The Wassat generation understands that the global age has brought the most diverse peoples into intimate and continuous contact in ways that often threaten breakdowns and conflicts. They seek to transcend these destructive cultural clashes with the message of civilizational Islam, with its "religious, human, and civilizational values that sanctify the dignity of human beings and respect religious and cultural plurality." In their view, "the contemporary interdependent and closely connected world needs centrism to achieve integration while preserving plurality." They recognize without defensiveness that "we need the advanced world and reach out for it in a spirit of amity and cooperation to obtain material progress and new methods." At the same time, they confidently assert that "the advanced world needs us, too, to give it a value-based and pluralistic model of cooperation built on respecting cultural specificity and human dignity, which have been eroded by materialism and torn apart by conflicts."[78]

The official party committee turned down the revised applications. Faced with these denials, the young activists sought other outlets for their energies and their hopes, as the example of the New Islamists suggested they should. Abul Ela Mady and others from the Wassat circle applied for a newspaper license, but that request, too, was denied. A new Islamist journal called *al Manar al Gadid* was licensed, however, and Wassat writers appeared regularly in its pages, along with others from the Islamic wave.

In April 2000, Abul Ela Mady, representing the Wassat group, announced the formation of an Association for Dialogue and Culture. The association was approved and registered by the Ministry of Social Affairs. In the words of its founders, the association would not be a substitute for the party, for which they intended to continue applying. The mission of the new association, instead, would be the related one of enhancing the national culture of dialogue with all social forces. The founders announced that the association was neither a party nor a professional organization but rather a meeting place in civil society for all trends. They indicated that they would enter these discussions on the premise that solutions to national issues should emerge from dialogue and be drawn from Egyptian culture, but without relying on "ready-made slogans and mottoes."[79] The young activists then turned to Selim al Awa to act as chairman of the Association.



Tareq al Bishry addresses the celebration in 2000 of the founding of the Association for Dialogue and Culture. (photograph courtesy of Abul Ela Mady)

Explaining the aims of the Association to the nation, Awa elaborated on the importance of both culture and dialogue to Egypt's future. "Culture" referred to the culture of the nation, as inherited from the past and developed for the future. It drew on "all the components of the national civilization, including religion, history, language, and the rich heritage of the people." To face the future, Awa commented, the nation must add to the riches inherited from earlier generations, making use of imported elements in ways that enriched the heritage and did not block access to its sources.

The Association would understand "dialogue" as interaction "with all and for the good of all." It would be a dialogue among those who differ, no matter how great those differences or the character of their origins and the forces that perpetuate them. No participant in the dialogue would be asked to abandon his or her creed, basic beliefs, or cherished ideas. The purpose of dialogue would be to clarify distinctions and differences in these areas, giving everyone a chance to make their contributions and to appreciate those of others. The only thing excluded from the dialogue would be the acceptance of humiliation and aggression, and the condoning of the abandonment of basic rights of the nation, its territories, and its beliefs.

Though open to all generations, the Association aimed to work for the fullest inclusion of the young, who must have priority because they are the hope of the nation. A special effort would also be made to include women

in the dialogue and to address issues of importance to them.[80] Awa emphasized the importance of civility and of the extension of the dialogue into all aspects of society, including the personal spheres of family and friendships.

The broad aim of the Association would be to deepen the understanding of Egyptians for what such a pluralistic dialogue could bring to their personal and collective lives. In the widest terms, this multifaceted dialogue would center on the challenge of "reaching a balance between reviving the cultural heritage and its renewal in ways that will give the nation's origins and fundamentals an understanding appropriate to the present and future, and open to others, in order to learn from their experience and achievements." In elaborating this mission, Awa mentioned such specific foci as the right of freedom of expression, diversity within the framework of unity, movements of change and reform, the changing and the constant in Egyptian culture, and Egypt's cultural role in the Arab Islamic world. He concluded that success in this purpose would help "revive the national memory in order to eliminate the widely held illusion that Egyptian struggles for renaissance for over a century have failed, or are declared dead without an heir to revive, or even preserve, their legacy."[81]

Acting on this ambitious agenda, the Association hosted its first important event in the spring of 2001, a two-day conference on "The Right of Freedom of Expression and the Nation's Fundamentals." Held at the Journalists' Association, the conference attracted a diverse audience numbering several hundred. Islamist activists from a wide variety of trends were present along with other intellectuals, eager to hear such speakers as Tareq al Bishry for the Islamists and Salah Eissa for secular intellectuals discuss the issue of free speech and the fundamentals. Selim al Awa acted as host and moderator.

With this gesture by Selim al Awa, who played a leadership role in creating a new opening for the younger generation, the New Islamists signaled that they would continue their support for youth in high-profile ways. Clearly, the New Islamists had accrued a reservoir of intellectual and moral capital that they were already passing on to the next generation of Islamist moderates. At the same time, they had attained an impressive national profile as intellectuals with a respected place in the moderate mainstream.

The State, the World, and the Islamic Awakening at the Start of the Millennium

Three of the major New Islamists, Selim al Awa, Tareq al Bishry, and Kamal Abul Magd, received invitations to participate as speakers in the annual Political Science Conference of Cairo University in early December of

1999.[82] Each year the faculty of Economics and Political Science organizes a conference designed to report to the nation the best thinking on a critical issue. At the dawn of a new millennium, whatever the official title, the theme could be none other than "Egypt in the Global Age." The prominent representation of the New Islamist School signaled the important place their work had won in Egyptian public life.

Unlike such conferences in other countries, the Cairo Conference is never purely an academic affair, and press coverage enables participants to speak to the informed public. Leading scholars and intellectuals from all fields whose work has made a contribution to the subject under discussion are invited. Each formal presentation has a designated commentator who is most often a prominent public figure or an important intellectual engaged with the issue. The audience, too, is not confined to academia. The two- to three-day conference always attracts academics and students but also journalists, figures influential in civil society, and decision-makers as well as the attentive general public.

Bishry, Awa, and Abul Magd moved comfortably into this setting. Their prominent inclusion signaled general recognition of the importance of their scholarly work on political affairs and their stature as public intellectuals who reach a wide audience. Though they are neither shaikhs nor directly linked to official Islam, their Islamist orientation is known to all. At the same time, they are fully at ease in a gathering of cosmopolitan intellectuals with a predominantly secular orientation. The invitation extended to them signaled that the Islamic current had once again produced major figures who had won a place of intellectual leadership in academic and public life. By the close of the conference, it was clear that these three came not only as distinguished individuals but also as leading participants in a school of Islamist thinkers who had produced a cohesive body of collective scholarship and built an impressive record of coordinated public interventions.

The Islamic current, usually spoken *for* in such gatherings, this time had its own powerful voice. While each of the three speakers made an individual contribution, their commentaries had an overall coherence that reflected the shared Islamic vision of their school. Bishry analyzed continuities in patterns of state dominance in Egypt, while Abul Magd described the changing global context and its implications for the relationship between the state and society. Awa in turn reviewed the record and the promise of the broad Islamic wave of reform and renewal in the face of the authoritarianism of the state. Their combined reflections on the new global environment, the state, and the Islamic wave provided an enlightening tour of the horizon at century's end from a centrist Islamist perspec-

tive. Their words, reinforced by their very presence in this setting, signaled the imperative of including the Islamic center in the political mainstream. The three New Islamists made the case that only a mainstream strengthened by the inclusion of the *Wassatteyya* could hope to crystallize a compelling national project to meet the heightened challenges of the new century.

With the assurance of a leading historian, Tareq al Bishry laid out the central dilemma of Egyptian politics. The strong state dating back to Muhammad Aly completely dominated social and civil affairs. It did so quite independently of the character of constitutional arrangements or ideological orientations. Under feudalism, capitalism, and socialism alike, the power of the state consistently overwhelmed civic and social action, and weakened what Bishry called "communal society." Although Bishry used the term in ways similar to the more usual Western term of "civil society," his phrase avoided the idea of any opposition between the "civil" and the "religious" and thereby eliminated the tacit implication that Islamic institutions were to be excluded. The dominance of the state, Bishry argued, either preempted or censored independent efforts by relatively autonomous and often contending social forces to articulate the mainstream national interest. At the same time, successive regimes proved unable to articulate a comprehensive and compelling sense of national direction and identity. Bishry was here invoking his well-known critique of the imitative projects of both monarchical and revolutionary regimes that could not shake the hold of Western models and that, in the end, did not respond to Egyptian needs.

Bishry then linked this fatal disconnect between state power and national purpose to the unconstrained and arbitrary character of state power. The Egyptian state had refused the inherited Islamic framework for legitimating state power, turning instead to Western secular models. It did so, however, without subjecting state power to limitations established by a public consensus on democratic principles, as was the case in the Western democracies. The result, Bishry explained, was not simply authoritarianism. What emerged was a system of arbitrary rule with no organic and meaningful links to larger social purposes. There were no recognized and effective disciplinary mechanisms to guide state practices and policies in order to bring them into line with genuine national interest. In an Islamic system, the power to legislate is constrained by the higher purposes of Islam. In Western democracies, legislative power must function in ways responsive to the democratic principles that lie behind the mechanism of democratic rule. Neither set of defining constraints operated in the Egyptian context. In this sense, the power of the Egyptian state, Bishry

explained, was set adrift from any larger framework of higher purpose shared with or generated by the people.

Bishry concluded his analysis with an assessment of changed external conditions which, he believed, created new dangers. In the age of globalism, new and exceedingly powerful forms of external pressures were acting on small nations. By the end of the twentieth century, the capacity of the Egyptian state to contend with these foreign forces had declined precipitously. Thus, while the state remained overwhelmingly strong in the domestic arena, it had become weak and vulnerable in the most important external environments. Only a concerted effort by a strong communal society in support of the state's effort to resist foreign intrusions, Bishry warned, could hope to preserve a distinctive Egyptian cultural identity and advance the possibility of autonomous development. By overwhelming and dominating society and its strong Islamic wing, the state had denied itself that support. From this distinctive angle of vision, Bishry argued that state repression of the Islamic wave as a key element in communal society undermined the national interest.

Kamal Abul Magd extended Bishry's analysis by characterizing the new global context. The space-time compression of the late modern world, Abul Magd explained, had made isolation impossible and participation in the global order a necessity. At the same time, he made it clear that recognition of the new realities should not be confused with any naive celebration of globalization. The new, penetrating global forces had a differential impact that was as dangerous for the weak to ignore as it was difficult to counteract. Old thinking about the dangers of colonial powers, however, no longer captured the essence of the threat. The weaker nodes in the global system of connections, like Egypt, faced not a unified material civilization intent on occupation, but rather the autonomous and alluring fragments of that civilization, from McDonald's to the icons of popular culture, which had a penetrative power unlike anything seen before. The state was ill-equipped to counter such new forms of intrusion, with their potential for securing market access and cultural hegemony for the West. Abul Magd stressed that globalization was not simply a description of new elements of the late modern world brought about by technological advance, but rather "an interested prescription, pushed by powerful American-dominated global financial institutions and by the United States itself as the single superpower." He suggested that the changed character of the external environment enhanced the protective role of communal society. This understanding of the decentered character of the assault reinforced Bishry's sense that the best hope of resistance lay in cooperation between the state and a revitalized communal society. Unstated, though clearly un-

derstood, was the necessity to lift the state's siege of the Islamic wave so that it could play its role as an indispensable element of that strengthened communal society.

Selim al Awa completed the analysis by providing a centrist characterization of the Islamic wave and a candid delineation of the pattern of regime repression to which it has been subjected. The regime, with the help of secular intellectuals, tells the story of Islamic activism as one of degeneration, as the title of an influential but misleading study put it, from "reform to violence."[83] It does so in order to justify the repressive strategy of "drying the springs" that targets not just radicals but the Islamic wave as a whole. By identifying the violent radicals as the telos toward which the Islamic wave inevitably moves, the entire tradition can be homogenized and discredited. Moderates are seen to differ from radicals only on tactical issues of timing and means. The Islamic order they envision is alleged to be the same.

In this presentation at Cairo University, Selim al Awa asserted the right of the Islamic *Wassatteyya* to define and shape the legacy of Islamic political thought and its distinctive interpretations. In an impressive tour de force, he restored the complexity of the Islamic legacy that had been obscured by the distorting simplifications of hostile commentators. Awa showed how the *Wassatteyya* selectively drew from a tradition with both radical and moderate strands to create an Islamic mainstream that carried a distinctive Islamic vision of reform explicitly repudiating violence. There were no apologies, for example, in his recognition of the revolutionary al Afghany as the fountainhead of Islamic political thought in the late nineteenth century. From Afghany came the broad goals of reform and autonomy. For the mainstream, Afghany's most enduring contribution was his championing of the principle of the open-ended right of each generation to *ijtihad,* rather than any specific lessons on how those goals might be defined or achieved. Afghany had sanctioned a method that might well be used to define a strategy quite different from his own. On crucial issues, the *ijtihad* of the confident moderate center did depart from the formulations of the founder. The reformist Muhammad Abduh (Afghany's most celebrated follower), Awa indicated, had provided the substantive core of alternative mainstream commitments, with his call to build a public opinion for constitutional and representative political action instead of revolution. From Abduh, the *Wassatteyya* also took the related principles of the civil rather than religious character of government and the priority of education and intellectual work over politics.

However, the New Islamists made it clear that Abduh's was not the last word on these issues. The revolutionary activist Hassan al Banna, founder of the Muslim Brothers organization in the late 1920s, defined the next

significant moment in Islamic political theory at mid-twentieth century, from which the New Islamists drew important inspiration. In the centrist view, it is possible to recognize al Banna's pivotal role, while again borrowing only selectively from his legacy. Mainstream figures, including the New Islamists, have developed a pointed critique of al Banna that emphasizes his rigidity in organization and ideology, the general neglect of theoretical work, and an overemphasis on the political sphere. They explicitly reject the shadowy and violent underground activities of some elements from the Brotherhood. The New Islamists have added to this assessment a rejection of al Banna's negative views on pluralism and a refusal to accept his implicit judgment that the current regime had abrogated its Islamic responsibilities. They have also elaborated a much more inclusive view of the role of women and minorities in the Islamic community.

Nevertheless, Awa's characterization of al Banna at Cairo University clearly signaled that the centrists also insisted on the constructive and innovative dimensions of al Banna's thought and practice. At the heart of al Banna's project, Awa pointed out, was a reassertion of the comprehensiveness of Islam. The breadth of his engagements opened an extensive range of social fields, from education to the economy, within which the organization he founded could operate. Al Banna had shown how the Islamic wave could expand from elitist confines to a mass participatory movement. On that basis, the Muslim Brothers forged an unprecedented range of popular connections that showed how to turn an intellectual awakening into a movement of broad social transformation.

Awa did not shy away from treating the controversial figure Sayyid Qutb, who pushed these political views of al Banna to extreme conclusions in the 1950s and 1960s. Qutb's later work provided the theoretical underpinnings of political Islam in its most radical form. Awa acknowledged that Qutb had pronounced the Egyptian regime un-Islamic, and had provided the theoretical rationale for a minority vanguard to replace the regime, by force if necessary, with an extremist version of *hakemeyya.* The New Islamists forcefully rejected these arguments.

At this point, however, Awa's presentation took an unexpected turn. He used the acknowledgment that Qutb had turned al Banna's legacy in a radical direction to insist, with an impressive lack of defensiveness, that Qutb's extremist progeny did not own al Banna's legacy. In a significant departure from the usual interpretations of the al Banna story, Awa pointed out that there were mainstream thinkers within the Muslim Brothers who had made important theoretical contributions to a moderate interpretation of al Banna's place in Islamic thought. There was no imperative to move from al Banna to Qutb to the extremist, violent minorities. Awa singled out

two Brotherhood intellectuals, Hassan al Ashmawy and Taufiq al Shawy, for their contributions to a contrasting moderate line of development. Ashmawy, according to Awa, strengthened the foundations of gradualist thinking by sharpening the distinction in Islamic political thought between what is unchanging because it is from God, and what is variable because it is human. Ashmawy also clearly rejected the notion of religious government as un-Islamic and placed a strong emphasis on individual freedom. Awa reported that al Shawy added to this contribution with his work on the concept of *shura* and its centrality in Islamic political theory, as well as his insistence that religious leadership be separated from the rightful political leadership of elected officials.[84] Both Ashmawy and al Shawy found justifications for these positions in al Banna's complex legacy, and to that degree reclaimed him for the moderates.

Awa then discussed the most recent period, from the mid-1970s to the present, which offered new opportunities and challenges for the development of centrist Islamic thought. On the one hand, the worldwide religious revival had a positive impact in the Islamic world, bringing large numbers of new activists into the Islamic wave. The modest regime liberalizations that held out promise in the 1970s allowed the emergence of Islamic journals and newspapers where Islamic intellectuals could exchange ideas. On the whole, however, Awa felt that the activist Islamic movements were not up to the task of rationalizing the Islamic wave, remarking that they "never presented an intellectual vision capable of turning this spontaneous wave into continuously renewed Islamic Awakening." The thought of this period was for the most part a "thought of crisis," defensive in tone, that responded to an agenda set by adversaries. Nevertheless, outside the confines of organized activist movements there were individual intellectuals who did make progress with "building rather than defense and mobilization," and Awa alluded to the work of figures in all Arab and Islamic countries who strengthened the intellectual foundations of moderate thought. Although Awa did not elaborate on these figures in his paper circulated at the conference, commentators during the discussion period made it clear that the New Islamists, including Awa himself, had been among the most productive in these efforts.

In discussing the new generation of moderates, Awa singled out the Wassat Party project, with their "thought distinct from the Islamic organizations that adopt violence and, at the same time, from the Muslim Brothers to which many of the members of these organizations went after the failure of their own organizations." Awa left no doubt that in his view, centrist Islamic thought had found its most compelling activist expression in the work of these youthful moderates.

Awa did not end on an optimistic note, however. In an unflinching conclusion, he spelled out the record of repression of the intellectuals and activists of the Islamic trend, which began with the fate of the founders and continued to the present day. Awa reminded his listeners that Afghany was opposed, exiled, and imprisoned in India, Persia, and the Hijaz. Abduh, too, was imprisoned, exiled, and denied the right of return to Egypt until he had categorically abandoned political activity. Al Banna, Awa commented wryly, was "accused of everything until he was finally assassinated and then buried without recognition or ceremony." The distinguished jurist Sanhury, though never a member of any organized movement, was beaten, insulted, and confined to his home in a Cairo suburb for what were understood to be Islamist sympathies. The radical but brilliant Qutb was imprisoned twice and finally hanged, while the moderates Ashmawy and Shawy were both imprisoned and exiled. Ashmawy lived as a fugitive for three years in Upper Egypt, before escaping to live in exile for fifteen years. Shawy's release from prison and exile came only after mediation by the King of Morocco. Sadat's decision to allow exiles to come home made it possible for him to return to Egypt.

The New Islamist "new *fiqh* of politics," dealing with such core questions as democracy, citizenship, and human rights, enriched and extended the political thought of the resilient mainstream tradition out of which their school emerged. Acting within an authoritarian context, they struggled against the daunting obstacles that Selim al Awa catalogued to exemplify the ways in which their innovative thinking might inform responsible political action. In doing so, the New Islamists inspired Islam's next generation of centrists.

The political arena, however, was never the primary focus of the New Islamists' attention, though they did not fail to encourage the Islamic mainstream to make the most of the opportunities it occasionally offered. They themselves exemplified the ways in which moderate Islamic public figures could play a constructive role in political and civic life. Still, the New Islamists focused their primary efforts on the guidance of the Islamic mainstream, rather than on politics or civil society as ends in themselves. They did believe that the government, for all its limitations, maintained a system of order within which their long-term efforts to rethink the heritage could go forward. However, they had no grand illusions about what could or even should be accomplished in either the political sphere or civil society under such authoritarian conditions. They believed that opportunities for political and civic action would be modest, though worth pursuing. They considered other priorities, notably educational and cultural

changes, more significant. In general, the New Islamists reserved their larger aspirations for the strengthening of the *Wassatteyya* and the refinement of its collective thinking and action. Reaching beyond politics and civil society, they aimed to make the *Wassatteyya* a force for the gradual social and cultural remaking of Egypt. In their new political *fiqh* and in the record of their public interventions motivated by this political thinking, they spelled out the political implications of this long-term transformation.