

9. Hasan al-Banna Proclaims Egyptian Nationalism and the Religious Basis for an Islamic State, 1949

Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949) grew up in an Egypt that was in many ways a British colony. He came of age at a time when it appeared that the European “West” was directly or indirectly dominating Muslim societies. This hegemony was accompanied by attacks on Islam from colonial quarters, as well as from indigenous and secular groups and individuals. In 1928, amid the political chaos and cultural confusion in Egypt—and in the larger Islamic world—al-Banna established the Muslim Brotherhood. This political party was dedicated to restoring Egyptian independence from the British and—perhaps more important—to the social and political regeneration of Egypt through the establishment of a “truly” Islamic polity and society.

By this al-Banna meant the reconstruction and reestablishment of the type of polity that existed briefly after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and the religious leadership and political leadership were ostensibly one and the same. Furthermore, and in addition to having a believing Muslim lead the *umma*, al-Banna believed that such a polity could come into existence only when Islamic laws—and only Islamic laws—govern society. The Brotherhood, however, did not look to the past for the specifics of its program. Rather, it was a thoroughly “modern” phenomenon that sought to reinterpret the *Shari’a* within the technological, economic, political, and social contexts of the twentieth century. Like his Pakistani counterpart Mawdudi, al-Banna argued the fact that the loudspeaker, invented in the West, should not deter a Muslim from using it—after making it an “Islamic loudspeaker.” Al-Banna remained the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood until his assassination by the Egyptian government in 1949. In this document he spells out some of his ideas for creating an Islamic nation in Egypt.

Discussion Questions

- A universal Islam stands in apparent contradiction with a national boundary. How does Hasan al-Banna reconcile the two in constructing his brand of Islamic nationalism?
- What does the list of social legislation that Hasan al-Banna recommends tell us about what life was like in Egypt at the time?
- How would you characterize the economic reforms proposed by al-Banna? Were they geared more toward a capitalist or a socialist system? Or were they completely different from either?

Five Tracts of Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949): A Selection from the Majma' al-Rasa' al-Innam al-Shahid Hasan al-Banna, trans. Charles Wendell, *Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 20 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 75–77. Reprinted by permission.

A Bold Step but a Successful One

Excellency,

... [I]t would be inexcusable for us to turn aside from the path of truth—the path of Islam—and to follow the path of fleshly desires and vanities—the path of Europe. Along the path of Europe are to be found outer show and cheap tinsel, pleasures and luxuries, laxity and license, and comforts that captivate the soul, for all of these things are loved by the soul, as the Almighty says: “Made beautiful for mankind is the love of fleshly desires for women, and children, and heaped-up mounds of gold and silver, and branded horses, and cattle, and tilled land. That is the comfort of this world” [Q.3:14].

But the path of Islam is glory, impregnability, truth, strength, blessedness, rectitude, stability, virtue, and nobility. Follow it along with the *umma*, may God grant you success! “Say: ‘Shall I inform you of something better than that? For those who are godfearing in the presence of their Lord, there are Gardens beneath which rivers flow, they being in them forever, and purified spouses, and the approbation of God. God is aware of His worshippers’” [Q.3:15].

Luxuries only annihilate nations, and her comforts and coveted possessions have only convulsed Europe: “And when We wish to destroy a city, We command its men of wealth, and they commit transgression in it, and the sentence against it is justified, and We destroy it utterly” [Q.3:16].

God (Blessed and Almighty is He!) sent His Apostle as a mercy to the worlds until the Day of Resurrection, and sent His Book with him as a light and a guidance until the Day of Resurrection. The leadership of the Apostle (May God bless and save him!) survives in his Sunna, and the authority of the Qur’an is secure through his proof. Humanity is marching inevitably toward them both, with the might of the mighty and the humility of the humble, from near and from afar, so that God’s Word should be realized: “that He may make it triumphant over every religion” [Q.9:33].

Be the first to come forward in the name of God’s Apostle (May God bless and save him!) bearing the vial of Qur’anic healing, to save the tormented, sick world! It is a bold step, but one crowned with success, God willing (Blessed and Almighty is He!), for God is victorious in His affairs: “Then the believers will rejoice in God’s succor. He succors whom He will, for He is the Mighty, the Merciful” [Q.30:4–5].

Some Steps Toward Practical Reform

Excellency,

Having given a clear presentation of the spiritual mood that should prevail within the nation in its modern renaissance, we would like to point out, by way of conclusion, some of the practical manifestations and results which this mood should dictate. We are going to mention here only the broadest topics, since we are well aware that each one of these questions demands extensive and

intensive study, taxing the energies and capacities of specialists. We know too that we have not yet plumbed all the puzzling problems and demands of the nation, nor all the manifestations of the renaissance. We do not believe that the fulfillment of these demands is a mere trifle which can be accomplished overnight, and we know that before many of them there are manifold obstacles which will require vast patience, great wisdom, and keen determination. We know all this and can take it in our stride. And besides this, we know that where there is genuine resolve, the way will be made plain, and that if a strong-willed nation chooses the path of goodness, it shall, by God Almighty's will, attain what it desires. Stride forward, and God will be with you! Following are the principal goals of reform grounded on the spirit of genuine Islam:

First: Political, judicial, and administrative:

- (1) An end to party rivalry, and a channeling of the political forces of the nation into a common front and a single phalanx.
- (2) A reform of the law, so that it will conform to Islamic legislation in every branch.
- (3) A strengthening of the armed forces, and an increase in the number of youth groups; the inspiration of the latter with zeal on the bases of Islamic *jihad*.
- (4) A strengthening of the bonds between all Islamic countries, especially the Arab countries, to pave the way for practical and serious consideration of the matter of the departed Caliphate.
- (5) The diffusion of the Islamic spirit throughout all departments of the government, so that all its employees will feel responsible for adhering to Islamic teachings.
- (6) The surveillance of the personal conduct of all its employees, and an end to the dichotomy between the private and professional spheres.
- (7) Setting the hours of work in summer and winter ahead, so that it will be easy to fulfill religious duties, and so that keeping late hours will come to an end.
- (8) An end to bribery and favoritism, with consideration to be given only to capability and legitimate reasons [for advancement].
- (9) Weighing all acts of the government in the scales of Islamic wisdom and doctrine; the organization of all celebrations, receptions, official conferences, prisons and hospitals so as not to be incompatible with Islamic teaching; the arranging of work-schedules so that they will not conflict with hours of prayer.
- (10) The employment of graduates of Al-Azhar in military and administrative positions, and their training.

Second: Social and educational:

- (1) Conditioning the people to respect public morality, and the issuance of directives fortified by the aegis of the law on this subject; the imposition of severe penalties for moral offenses.
- (2) Treatment of the problem of women in a way which combines the progressive and the protective, in accordance with Islamic teaching, so that this

problem—one of the most important social problems—will not be abandoned to the biased pens and deviant notions of those who err in the directions of deficiency or excess.

- (3) An end to prostitution, both clandestine and overt: the recognition of fornication, whatever the circumstances, as a detestable crime whose perpetrator must be flogged.
- (4) An end to gambling in all its forms—games, lotteries, racing, and gambling-clubs.
- (5) A campaign against drinking, as there is one against drugs: its prohibition, and the salvation of the nation from its effects.
- (6) A campaign against ostentation in dress and loose behavior; the instruction of women in what is proper, with particular strictness as regards female instructors, pupils, physicians, and students, and all those in similar categories.
- (7) A review of the curricula offered to girls and the necessity of making them distinct from the boys' curricula in many of the stages of education.
- (8) Segregation of male and female students; private meetings between men and women, unless within the permitted degrees [of relationship], to be counted as a crime for which both will be censured.
- (9) The encouragement of marriage and procreation, by all possible means; promulgation of legislation to protect and give moral support to the family, and to solve the problems of marriage.
- (10) The closure of morally undesirable ballrooms and dance-halls, and the prohibition of dancing and other such pastimes.
- (11) The surveillance of theatres and cinemas, and a rigorous selection of plays and films.
- (12) The expurgation of songs, and a rigorous selection and censorship of them.
- (13) The careful selection of lectures, songs, and subjects to be broadcast to the nation; the use of radio broadcasting for the education of the nation in a virtuous and moral way.
- (14) The confiscation of provocative stories and books that implant the seeds of skepticism in an insidious manner, and newspapers which strive to disseminate immorality and capitalize indecently on lustful desires.
- (15) The supervision of summer vacation areas so as to do away with the wholesale confusion and license that nullify the basic aims of vacationing.
- (16) The regulation of business hours for cafés; surveillance of the activities of their regular clients; instructing these as to what is in their best interest; withdrawal of permission from cafés to keep such long hours.
- (17) The utilization of these cafés for teaching illiterates reading and writing; toward this end, the assistance of the rising generation of elementary schoolteachers and students.
- (18) A campaign against harmful customs, whether economic, moral, or anything else; turning the masses away from these and orienting them in the direction of ways beneficial to them, or educating them in a way consonant

with their best interests. These involve such customs as those to do with weddings, funerals, births, the *zār*, civil and religious holidays, etc. Let the government set a good example in this respect.

(19) Due consideration for the claims of the moral censorship, and punishment of all who are proved to have infringed any Islamic doctrine or attacked it, such as breaking the fast of Ramāḍān, willful neglect of prayers, insulting the faith, or any such act.

(20) The annexation of the elementary village schools to the mosques, and a thoroughgoing reform of both, as regards employees, cleanliness, and overall custodial care, so that the young may be trained in prayer and the older students in learning.

(21) The designation of religious instruction as a basic subject in all schools, in each according to its type, as well as in the universities.

(22) Active instigation to memorize the Qur'ān in all the free elementary schools; making this memorization mandatory for obtaining diplomas in the areas of religion and [Arabic] language; the stipulation that a portion of it be memorized in every school.

(23) The promulgation of a firm educational policy which will advance and raise the level of education, and will supply it, in all its varieties, with common goals and purposes; which will bring the different cultures represented in the nation closer together, and will make the first stage of its process one dedicated to inculcating a virtuous, patriotic spirit and an unwavering moral code.

(24) The cultivation of the Arabic language at every stage of instruction; the use of Arabic alone, as opposed to any foreign language, in the primary stages.

(25) The cultivation of Islamic history, and of the national history and national culture, and the history of Islamic civilization.

(26) Consideration of ways to arrive gradually at a uniform mode of dress for the nation.

(27) An end to the foreign spirit in our homes with regard to language, manners, dress, governesses, nurses, etc.; all these to be Egyptianized, especially in upper-class homes.

(28) To give journalism a proper orientation, and to encourage authors and writers to undertake Islamic, Eastern subjects,

(29) Attention to be given to matters of public health by disseminating health information through all media; increasing the number of hospitals, physicians, and mobile clinics; facilitating the means of obtaining medical treatment.

(30) Attention to be given to village problems as regards their organization, their cleanliness, the purification of their water supply, and the means to provide them with culture, recreation, and training.

Third: the economic

(1) The organization of *zakāt* in terms of income and expenditure, according to the teachings of the magnanimous Sacred Law; invoking its assistance in carrying out necessary benevolent projects, such as homes for the aged, the poor, and orphans, and strengthening the armed forces.

(2) The prohibition of usury, and the organization of banks with this end in view. Let the government provide a good example in this domain by relinquishing all interest due on its own particular undertakings, for instance in the loan-granting banks, industrial loans, etc.

(3) The encouragement of economic projects and an increase in their number; giving work to unemployed citizens in them; the transfer of such of these as are in the hands of foreigners to the purely national sector.

(4) The protection of the masses from the oppression of monopolistic companies; keeping these within strict limits, and obtaining every possible benefit for the masses.

(5) An improvement in the lot of junior civil servants by raising their salaries, by granting them steady increases and compensations, and by lowering the salaries of senior civil servants.

(6) A reduction in the number of government posts, retaining only the indispensable ones; an equitable and scrupulous distribution of the work among civil servants.

(7) The encouragement of agricultural and industrial counselings; attention to be paid to raising the production level of the peasant and industrial worker.

(8) A concern for the technical and social problems of the worker; raising his standard of living in numerous respects.

(9) The exploitation of natural resources, such as uncultivated land, neglected mines, etc.

(10) Priority over luxury items to be given to necessary projects in terms of organization and execution.

This is the message of the Muslim Brotherhood. We submit it, and place ourselves, our talents, and all we possess in the hands of any committee or government desirous of taking a step forward, hand in hand with an Islamic nation, toward progress and advancement. We will answer the call, and we are prepared to sacrifice ourselves. We hope that by so doing we will have fulfilled our trust and said our piece, for religion means sincerity toward God, His Apostle, His Book, the Imāms of the Muslims, and their community at large. God is our sufficiency; He is enough; and peace to His chosen worshippers!