

An Islamist View of Government in Islam

The following material comes from a book entitled *Social Justice in Islam* by Sayyid Qutb, who is discussed on **pp. 234-5** of *Introducing Islam* (see also the Glossary).

(Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism: A translation and critical analysis of "Social Justice in Islam" (Al-'Adalah al-ijtima'iyah fi al-islam), Leiden: Brill, 1996. (ISBN 90-04-1015) Website: <http://www.brill.nl/default.aspx?partid=18&pid=2673>)

Sayyid Qutb was born in a village in the area of Asyut in Upper Egypt in 1906 and as a school boy was a strong partisan of Sa'd Zaghlul's campaign for Egyptian independence. He moved to Cairo in 1921 to further his education and eventually became a teacher and then an official in the Ministry of Education. He was also a poet, a literary critic and a writer on social issues and he moved in the same circles as Taha Hussein and Abbas al-'Aqqad (see **p. 81** in *Introducing Islam* and the index on Taha Hussein). His views can be described as secularist and reformist. In the period immediately after the Second World War he voiced harsh criticism of Western imperialism and of the political and economic leadership of Egypt, first in secular terms and then, from 1948, in Islamist terms. *Social Justice in Islam*, written in 1948, was his first major Islamist statement. From late 1948 until 1950 he was in the United States on a study program and became harshly critical of the materialism of American society. After his return to Egypt he joined the Muslim Brothers and quickly become one of its leading spokespeople. The Brothers first supported but soon became disillusioned with the government of Abdel Nasser, which came to power in 1952. When their leaders were arrested in 1954 Qutb was among them and he remained in prison for most of the rest of his life. He was briefly released in 1964 but rearrested the following year on the charge of conspiring against the government and was executed in 1966, thus becoming a martyr to the Islamist cause. It was in prison that he developed his radical ideas that are found in the passage below and even more in *Milestones* and parts of *In the Shade*

of the Quran. These ideas are considered by many to form an important part of the inspiration of Bin Laden and others connected with al-Qaeda.

There are large number of books and articles on Sayyid Qutb. A good introductory treatment is Charles Tripp, "Sayyid Qutb: The Political Vision" in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahmena (London: Zed, 1994, republished 2005). A good book length treatment of his whole life is Adnan Musallam, *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* (Praeger, 2005)

While *Milestones* and *In the Shade of the Quran* are better known, *Social Justice in Islam* offers a more systematic presentation of his social and political views and also affords an opportunity to trace the development of his ideas from the beginning of his Islamist period to almost the end of his life. The book was written in 1948 and first published in 1949. It was republished five times: in 1950 (or 1951), in 1952 (before the Free Officers' coup), in 1954 (before he was imprisoned), in 1958 and in 1964 (while he was out of prison). The 1964 edition is the one that is still in print and has presumably been read by the most people. In each of the editions there are revision by the author reflecting his current views, the greatest change coming between the 1958 and 1964 editions. A comparison of these editions makes it possible to trace the development of Qutb's views on a number of issues.

This selection is a translation of the fifth chapter of *Social Justice in Islam*, as found in my book, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), and is reproduced here with the publisher's permission. The main text translates the last and most radical edition, while the footnotes and indented paragraphs indicate the points at which the earlier editions are different. Brackets with brief information are found at the end of

paragraphs that are either unchanged or completely changed. Paragraphs are numbered for convenience of reference; they are not numbered in the Arabic editions. The abbreviation SAW stands for the formula “may God bless him and grant him peace”, commonly used after the Prophet’s name (see *Introducing Islam*, pp. 7, 72)

There is also an English translation of the first edition, *Social Justice in Islam*, translated by John B. Hardie, revised by Hamid Algar (Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publications International, 2000).

One can profitably read the main text of this selection without reading the footnotes. The reader may, however, like to work out from the footnotes and indented paragraphs the changes in Qutb’s thinking over time that appear here.

A few minor modifications have been made in the published version of *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism*, mainly in the footnotes. Some footnotes that I consider not to be of value to the student are deleted and a couple of explanatory notes are added. A few Arabic words in parentheses are deleted from the main text and three paragraphs (21, 22 and 37) that were in an appendix are placed indented at the appropriate place in the main text. Circumflex accents are used rather than macrons to indicate long vowels and dots under letters are not provided. The final h is used in transliterating Arabic in this text where it is not used in *Introducing Islam* (see p. xvii, *ta marbuta*)

Chapter 5. Government in Islam

1. Every discussion of "social justice in Islam" must include a discussion of "government in Islam", in accordance with the basic principle we laid down when we were discussing the nature of Islamic social justice, namely, that it deals with all aspects of life and all kinds of activity, just as it deals with both spiritual and material values, which are inextricably intermixed. [No change.]

2. Government is related to all of this, in addition to the fact that the enforcement of legislation is finally dependent on it, as is the maintenance of all aspects of society, the achievement of justice and harmony, and the distribution of wealth according to the principles prescribed by Islam. [No change.]

3. A full treatment of government in Islam would be lengthy and would require a separate study, but since our purpose in this book is to explain only that aspect of government which bears on social justice, we will try so far as possible to limit ourselves to this. The difficulty in studying Islam is that the enquirer finds that all aspects of it are interconnected and cannot be separated from each other. The whole of this religion forms a unity; worship and human relations (*mu'âmalât*), conduct of government and management of wealth, legislation and moral guidance, belief and behavior, this world and the world to come, all of these are well coordinated parts of an integrated mechanism, and it is difficult to single out one of them for discussion without dealing with the others too, but we shall try, so far as possible.

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4. Some¹ who discuss the Islamic system – whether the social system or the system of government or the form of government² – make an effort to show relationships and similarities between it and the other kinds of systems that humanity has known in ancient and modern times, before and since Islam. Some of them believe that they find strong support for Islam when they show a relationship between it and some other ancient or modern system.

5. This effort reflects nothing but an inward feeling of defeat in the face of the human systems that humans have formed for themselves in isolation from God,³ for Islam gains nothing if there are similarities between it and other systems, and loses nothing if there are not. Islam presents to humanity an example of a completely integrated system the like of which is not found in any other system the world has known before or since Islam. Islam does not try and has not tried to imitate any of the other systems, or to establish any relationship or similarity between itself and them, but rather chooses its own unique and distinctive path and presents to humanity a complete cure for all its problems.

6. It may happen in the development of human systems that they coincide with Islam sometimes and diverge from it sometimes, but Islam is a complete and independent system and has no connection with these other systems, neither when they coincide with it nor when they diverge from it, for such divergence and coincidence are purely accidental and in scattered parts. Agreement or disagreement in partial and

¹ Eds. 1-5 add "Muslims".

² Eds. 1-5 do not have: "whether social system . . . form of government".

³ Eds. 1-5 read "Western systems" instead of "human systems . . . in isolation from God".

accidental matters is of no consequence. What matters is the basic view,⁴ the particular conception,⁵ and Islam has its own basic view⁴ and its own particular conception⁵ from which the parts branch out. These parts may coincide with or diverge from the parts of other systems but after each coinciding or divergence Islam continues on its own unique path.

7. The principle upon which the Islamic system is based differs from the principles upon which all human systems are based. It is based upon the principle that sovereignty (*hâkimiyyah*) belongs to God alone, and He alone legislates. The other systems are based on the principle that sovereignty belongs to man, and it is he who legislates for himself. These two basic principles do not coincide, and therefore the Islamic system cannot really coincide with any other system, and cannot be called anything but "Islam". [Last ed. only.]

8. It is not the task of the Islamic enquirer, when he undertakes to discuss the Islamic system, to seek out similarities to or agreements with any other system, ancient or modern. These similarities and agreements — in addition to being superficial and partial, arising from mere coincidence in matters of detail, and not in the general conception⁵ or the basic view⁴ — add nothing to the strength of Islam, as some defeatists⁶ think. The right way is for them to present the bases of their religion in and of themselves in the total faith that these bases are complete, whether they agree with all other systems or disagree with all others. The very effort to find support for the Islamic systems in similarities to or agreements with other systems is a sign of a

⁴ Eds. 1-5 read "idea (*fikrah*)" instead of "view (*nazrah*)".

⁵ Eds. 1-5 read "philosophy (*falsafah*)" instead of "conception (*tasawwur*)".

⁶ Eds. 1-5 read "Muslims" instead of "defeatists".

defeatist attitude as we have said, and is an effort that will not be made by a Muslim enquirer who has a true knowledge of this religion and investigates it in the right way.

9. In the course of its origin and development, the world has known a number of systems, but the Islamic system is not one of these systems. It is not like them nor is it derived from them as a group. It is a system which stands on its own, independent in its thought and unique in its methods, and we must present it as something independent, because it originated independently and has proceeded independently on its way. [No change.]

10. Because of these considerations, we cannot accept Dr Haykal's interpretation of the Islamic world as an "Islamic Empire", nor his statement that "Islam was an imperial power" for there is nothing further from the true understanding of the spirit of Islam than to speak of it as imperial, however much we may distinguish between the meaning of Islamic empire and empire in the currently familiar sense. Nothing is further from an understanding of the true nature of the relationships in the Islamic world than to speak of it as an Islamic empire! [No change.]

11. It is strange that Dr. Haykal, in his discussion of Islamic government in *Hayât Muhammad (The Life of Muhammad)* or *Al-Siddîq Abu Bakr* or *Al-Fârûq 'Umar*, seeks the true inner difference between the nature of Islam and the nature of the other systems the world has known, and yet is induced to use these expressions by virtue of the hold that foreign phenomena have over his thinking as well as by the similarities between some manifestations of Islam and those of imperialism and by virtue of the

fact that he has not noticed that basic divergence between a system based on the sovereignty of God alone and another system based on the sovereignty of man!⁷

12. Perhaps the point of formal similarity is that the Islamic world was composed of a number of provinces with widely differing races and cultures ruled from a single center. This is a mark of empire! But it is merely an outward mark. What matters is the way the center views the provinces and the nature of the relationships between them. [No change.]

13. Anyone who studies the spirit of Islam and its way of governing knows for certain that it is the furthest thing from the empires we know today. For Islam gives equality to the Muslims from all parts of the world, and it rejects racial, national⁸ and regional partisanship.⁹ In accordance with this spirit it does not make the provinces into colonies, nor places to be exploited or milked for the sole benefit of the center. Every province is a member of the body of the Islamic world, and its people have the same rights as those of the center. If some provinces were governed by a governor from the Islamic center, he governed by virtue of being a Muslim qualified for the position and not as a colonial ruler, while many of the liberated¹⁰ provinces were governed by one of their own people,¹¹ but only because he was a Muslim qualified for this position. Likewise, the moneys collected in any province were first spent within it and then if anything was left it was sent to the public treasury of the Muslims to be

⁷ Eds. 1-5 do not have: "and by virtue of the fact . . . based on the sovereignty of man!".

⁸ Eds. 1-5 do not have "national (*qawmiyyah*)".

⁹ Eds. 1-5 have in addition: "indeed it even transcends religious partisanship at many points, as we have seen".

¹⁰ Translator's note: literally "opened". "Conquered" would be a more standard translation and one that I use elsewhere, but "liberated" better reflects the author's intention, especially here.

spent upon the Muslims in general as needed and not be appropriated by the people of the center at the risk of impoverishing the provinces, as is the practice in empires.

14. All of this sets a great distance between the Islamic world, or more accurately the Islamic *ummah*, and an empire. To speak of Islam as imperial is to introduce a term that is foreign both to the spirit of Islam and to its actual history. It is more appropriate to say that it was worldwide¹² in its tendency because of its strong idea of the unity of the world¹³ and its goal of gathering all humanity under its banner of equality and brotherhood.

15. Dr. Taha Husayn has been more precise when, in the introduction to his book, *Al-Fitnah al-Kubrâ - 'Uthmân (The Great Civil War - 'Uthman)*, he discusses the Islamic system of government in comparison to all other systems and says that it differs in its basic nature from others, and this is the truth when one looks at the spirit and nature of government and not at its outward details. [No change.]

16. However, Dr. Taha Husayn makes this statement of his the premise of a very different and dangerous conclusion, and this is that Islam in the form it achieved in the time of the Apostle of God (SAW) and the two leaders after him was a lofty anomaly which humanity could not sustain for long. This is the tune sung by the orientalist and their disciples in Islamic countries as a preface to the claim that Islam is not suitable to be the system of government in these days. [Last ed. only.]

¹¹ Eds. 1-5 have in addition: "not because he was one of their people".

¹² Eds. 1-5 read: "broadly human (*insânî*)" instead of "worldwide (*'âlamî*)".

¹³ Eds. 1-5 read "humanity (*insâniyyah*)" instead of "world (*'âlam*)".

17. Likewise, I cannot accept the talk that we hear about "the socialism of Islam" or "the democracy of Islam" or other such efforts to mix the system made by God (S) with systems made by humans, bearing the human stamp and characterized by the human mixture of imperfection and perfection, error and accuracy, weakness and strength, fancy and truth . . . while the divinely ordained system of Islam is free from these characteristics and is perfect and comprehensive and completely untouched by error.

[Last ed. only.]

18. Islam presents independent solutions to the problems of humanity, deriving them from its particular conceptions, its own essential method,¹⁴ its authentic bases, and its distinctive means, and when we discuss it we must not use other doctrines¹⁵ and theories to interpret it or add them to it. It is a complete method¹⁶ and a harmonious unity, and the introduction of any foreign element into it is liable to ruin it – like a delicate and perfect mechanism which may be put out of operation by a single foreign piece – or to appear like an incongruous patch on it.¹⁷

19. In summary, this is the point I have to make because many who have absorbed into their culture and thinking foreign pieces from the machinery of alien systems think they are giving Islam new strength when they graft these systems onto it, but this is a dangerous illusion which ruins Islam and makes its spirit inoperative. At the same time it betrays a hidden feeling of defeat even though they don't openly admit defeat. [No change.]

¹⁴ Eds. 1-5 read "its unified thought" instead of "its particular conceptions, its own essential method".

¹⁵ Eds. 1-5 read "principles (*mabâdi'*)" instead of "doctrines (*madhâhib*)".

¹⁶ Eds. 1-5 read "philosophy" instead of "method (*manhaj*)".

¹⁷ Ed. 1 does not have: "or to appear like an incongruous patch on it".

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20. The Islamic system is based on two fundamental ideas derived from its overall conception¹⁸ of Divinity,¹⁹ of the universe, life and man: the idea of the unity of humanity in race, nature and origin, and the idea that Islam is the general²⁰ world-wide system and that God accepts no other system because He accepts no other religion than Islam, and religion - in the Islamic understanding - is the general system that governs life.²¹

21. As for the idea of the unity of humanity in race, nature and origin we have already discussed this when speaking of "the foundations of social justice in Islam."

The following longer version of paragraph 21 and also paragraph 22 are found in the earlier editions.

21. [Eds. 1-5] As for the idea of the unity of humanity in race, nature and origin we have already discussed this when speaking of "the foundations of social justice in Islam" and have indicated that the rights that Islam extends to Dhimmis and to idolaters who have a treaty with the Muslims stand on a purely human basis, there being no difference between the people of one religion and those of another, since the matter refers ultimately to common human factors. If Islam commanded its adherents to fight against the idolaters, this was only a defensive²² war

¹⁸ Eds. 1-5 read "idea (*fikrah*)" instead of "conception (*tasawwur*)"

¹⁹ Eds. 1-5 do not have "divinity (*ulûhiyyah*)"

²⁰ Eds. 1-5 read "eternal" instead of "general".

²¹ Eds. 1-5 read "for the future of the human race" instead of "and that God accepts no other . . . the general system that governs life".

²² Eds. 3-5 omit "defensive".

to repel aggression.²³ "Leave is given to those who fight because they were wronged - surely God is able to help them."²⁴ "Fight in the way of God with those who fight with you, but aggress not: God loves not the aggressor."²⁵ It is a war to repel material aggression against the Muslims so that they may not be seduced from their religion, and to remove the material obstacles from the path of the message (*da'wah*), so that it may reach all people.

22. [Eds. 1-5] In fulfilling its treaty obligations to non-Muslims Islam goes even to the extent of refraining from helping Muslims against non-Muslims with whom the Muslims have a treaty: "If they ask you for help, for religion's sake, it is your duty to help them, except against a people between whom and you there is a compact."²⁶ This is an ideal example of care to fulfill treaty obligations, based on a broad, world-wide view of humanity which transcends local interests and limits aims, even in matters connected with religion.

²³ Eds. 3-5 add: "and freedom for preaching (*da'wah*) and freedom for faith".

²⁴ Author's note: Surat al-Hajj (22), 39. Eds. 3, 5 add: "who were expelled from their habitations without right, except that they say, 'Our Lord is God.' Had God not driven back the people, some by the means of others, there had been destroyed cloisters and churches, oratories and mosques, wherein God's Name is much mentioned. Assuredly God will help him who helps Him – surely God is All-strong, All-mighty." [vs. 40]

²⁵ Author's note: Surat al-Baqarah (2), 190.

²⁶ Author's note: Surat al-Anfal (8), 72.

23. As for the idea that Islam is the general world-wide system and that God accepts no other system,²⁷ it is derived from the fact that Muhammad (SAW)²⁸ is the Apostle of God to all people and that he was the seal of the prophets, and that his religion is the soundest religion. "We have sent thee not, except to mankind entire."²⁹ "We have not sent thee save as a mercy to all beings."³⁰ "The Apostle of God and the seal of the prophets."³¹ "Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed my blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam for your religion."³² "Surely this Qur'an guides to the way that is soundest."³³

24. "Religion (*al-dîn*)" in the Islamic understanding is synonymous with the word "system (*nizâm*)" in modern terminology, with the complete meaning of a creed in the heart, ethical principles in behavior and Shari‘ah in society . . . All of this is contained in the concept "religion" in Islam. Therefore there cannot be a system that God accepts and Islam confirms unless it is this system derived from the doctrinal conception of Islam and represented in administrative systems and acts of legislation derived from the Islamic Shari‘ah and from nothing else. The most important thing is that those who are part of this system fully recognise the divinity (*ulûhiyyah*) and supreme authority (*rubûbiyyah*) of God and do not arrogate to themselves the right to issue laws and regulations because this is the right of God alone in Islam. At this point the Islamic system diverges fundamentally from all human systems. [Last ed. only.]

²⁷ Eds. 1-5 read: "for the future of the human race" instead of "and that God accepts no other system".

²⁸ Eds 1-5 do not have" (SAW)".

²⁹ Author's note: Surat Saba' (34), 28.

³⁰ Author's note: Surat al-Anbiya' (21), 107.

³¹ Author's note: Surat al-Ahzab (33), 40.

³² Author's note: Surat al-Ma'idah (5), 3.

³³ Author's note: Surat al-Isra' (17), 9.

25. But, even so, Islam does not compel others to embrace it, "No compulsion is there in religion; rectitude has become clear from error."³⁴ Indeed, it grants them the fullest freedom and protection in conducting their religious rites, and has such a sensitive concern for this freedom that it imposes Zakat and Jihad³⁵ on Muslims only and in place of these takes *jizyah* from the Dhimmis, since they share with the Muslims the protection afforded by the Islamic state and thus they must all share in its expenses. But it does not make these expenses Zakat for the *dhimmîs* - as it does not impose participation in Jihad upon them - unless they consent and accept,³⁶ because Zakat is an Islamic obligation and a form of worship specifically for Muslims - and likewise is Jihad³⁷ - and it does not want to compel Dhimmis to perform a specifically Muslim act of worship, so it taxes them on a purely financial basis, divesting it of the religious character found in the obligation of Zakat, and it excuses them from Jihad in defense of the Abode of Islam, whose security and comfort they enjoy.³⁸ This is the highest possible degree of sensitive concern for justice in dealing with others.

27. The fact that the Islamic system is based on these two ideas has had an effect on its nature and orientation, making it careful in its legislation and in its moral guidance, in its conduct of government and finance, and in the other systems that it includes, to legislate not for one race or one generation but for all nations and all generations. Thus it follows comprehensive human principles in all its legislation and administrative

³⁴ Author's note: Surat al-Baqarah (2), 256. Eds. 1-2 do not have: "rectitude has become clear from error".

³⁵ Eds. 1-5 do not have "and Jihad".

³⁶ Eds. 1-2 do not have:"- as it does not impose participation in Jihad upon them - unless they consent and accept,"; eds 3-5 lack only "- as it does not impose participation in Jihad upon them -".

³⁷ Eds. 1-5 do not have "and likewise is Jihad".

³⁸ Eds. 1-5 do not have: "and it excuses them from Jihad in defense of the Abode of Islam, whose security and comfort they enjoy."

provisions and setting the general foundations and broad principles and leaving many of³⁹ the applications to the development of time and the emergence of specific needs.

28. This orientation toward general principles is clear in the conduct of government, which is the specific concern of this chapter. [No change.]

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29. The theory of government in Islam is based on the testimony (*shahâdah*) that there is no god but God, and when one confesses that divinity belongs to God alone he thereby confesses that sovereignty in human life belongs to God alone; and God (S) exercises sovereignty in human life on one hand by directly controlling human affairs by His will and determination (*qadar*) and on the other hand by establishing the basic order of human life and human rights and duties and relationships and mutual obligations by His Shari‘ah and His program (*manhaj*). In the Islamic system, nobody is associated with God, neither in His will and determination nor in His Shari‘ah and program. Any other theory would be idolatry (*shirk*) and unbelief (*kufir*). Therefore, it is not possible for humans to set up systems of government with laws and ordinances on their own authority, for to do this is to reject the divinity of God and at the same time claim the characteristics of divinity for themselves, and this is clear unbelief. [Last ed. only.]

30 By this principle the Islamic system of government differs fundamentally from all systems of government and all social systems invented by mankind. This makes it unacceptable to mix the name of Islam with the names of human systems. [Last ed. only.]

³⁹ Eds. 1-5 do not have "many of".

31. Government in Islam is based, after acceptance of the sole Divinity and sovereignty of God,⁴⁰ on justice on the part of the rulers, obedience on the part of the ruled, and consultation between rulers and ruled. These are broad basic lines from which branch out other lines that lay out the shape and form of government after the preceding principle has laid out its nature and essence.⁴¹

32. (a) Justice on the part of the rulers: "Surely God commands justice"⁴² . . . "When you judge between the people, judge with justice"⁴³ . . . "And when you speak be just, even if it should be to a near kinsman"⁴⁴ . . . "Let not hatred for a people move you to be unjust; be just - that is nearer to godfearing"⁴⁵ . . . "The most beloved of men to God on the Day of Resurrection and the one seated nearest him will be a just leader, and the most hated by God on the Day of Resurrection and the most severely punished will be a tyrannical leader."⁴⁶

33. This is the absolute justice whose balance is untilted by love or hatred, whose principles are unchanged by affection or enmity, the justice that is unaffected by family relations between individuals or by hatred between nations, so that all members of the Islamic Ummah enjoy it irrespective of rank or ancestry, of wealth or prestige, and other nations also enjoy it even if there is hostility between them and the Muslims.

⁴⁰ Eds. 1-5 do not have: "after acceptance of the sole divinity and sovereignty of God".

⁴¹ Eds. 1-5 do not have: "that lay out the shape and form of government after the preceding principle has laid out its nature and essence".

⁴² Author's note: Surat al-Nahl (16), 90.

⁴³ Author's note: Surat al-Nisa' (4), 58.

⁴⁴ Author's note: Surat al-Anfal (6), 152.

⁴⁵ Author's note: Surat al-Ma'idah (5), 8.

⁴⁶ Author's note, eds. 3-6: The two shaykhs and al-Tirmidhi; eds. 1-2: Hadith.

This is the pinnacle of justice which no international law and likewise no national law has as yet achieved or even approached.⁴⁷

34. Those who reject this will have to revert to the justice that strong nations mete out to weak ones, to the justice meted out between those who are at war with each other. They will have to revert to the justice the White men give the Red people and the Black people⁴⁸ in the United States, the justice that the White give the Colored in South Africa, the justice that the Communists, the pagans, and the Crusaders give the Muslims in Russia, China, Yugoslavia, India, and Ethiopia,⁴⁹ just to mention a few cases since these are contemporary conditions well known to everyone.

35. The important thing about the justice of Islam is that it has not been merely theories but has been applied in practical life, and actual historical experience records well attested examples of it, the details of which will appear in the appropriate place since here we are concerned to present merely the Islamic "principles" as the authoritative texts show them.

36. (b) Obedience on the part of the governed. "O believers, obey God and obey the Apostle and those in authority among you"⁵⁰ The fact that this verse groups together God, the Apostle, and those in authority (*ûlû al-amr*) tells us the nature and limits of this obedience. Obedience to one in authority is derived from obedience to

⁴⁷ Eds. 1-5 omit "or even approached".

⁴⁸ Ed. 1 omits "and the Black". (Note: The first edition was written before Qutb's trip to the United States.)

⁴⁹ Author's note, eds. 5-6: Refer to the chapter, "The Muslims are Fanatics" in the book *Dirâsât Islâmiyyah (Islamic Studies)*, by the author. Translator's note: Eds. 1-4 do not have: "the justice that the Communists, the pagans, and the Crusaders give the Muslims in Russia, China, Yugoslavia, India, and Ethiopia". Ed. 5 includes most of this phrase, lacking "the Crusaders".

God and the Apostle, because the one who holds authority in Islam is not obeyed for his own sake, but is obeyed only because he submits to the authority of God and recognizes His sovereignty and then⁵¹ carries out the Shari‘ah of God and His Apostle, and it is from his recognition of God's sole sovereignty and then⁵² his execution of this Shari‘ah⁵³ that his right to obedience is derived. If he departs from either one⁵⁴ he is no longer entitled to obedience, and his orders need not be carried out. The one to whom the prophetic mission was entrusted (SAW)⁵⁵ says: "A Muslim must hear and obey whether he likes it or not, unless he is commanded to disobey God; in that case he must neither hear nor obey."⁵⁶ He also says, "Hear and obey, even if your governor is an Ethiopian slave with a head like a raisin, as long as he follows the Book of God (may He be exalted)."⁵⁷ It is clear in this Hadith that hearing and obeying is conditional upon following the Book of God Almighty. So there is no absolute obedience to the commands⁵⁸ of the ruler nor an obedience that continues even if he abandons the Shari‘ah of God and His Apostle.⁵⁹

The following paragraph 37 is found in eds. 1, 2.

37. [Eds. 1-2] "If someone sees a tyrannical authority who profanes

⁵⁰ Author's note: Surat al-Nisa' (4), 59.

⁵¹ Eds. 1-5 do not have: "submits to the authority of God and recognises His sovereignty and then . . .".

⁵² Eds. 1-5 omit: "recognition of God's sole sovereignty and then . . .".

⁵³ Eds. 1-5 have in addition "and no other".

⁵⁴ Eds. 1-5 read "it" instead of "either one".

⁵⁵ *Sahib al-risalah* ; eds. 1-5 read "The one who brought the Shari‘ah (*Ṣ aḥ ib al-sharī‘ah*)" and omit "(SAW)". (The reading in eds. 1-5 might suggest that Muhammad rather than God is the source of the Shari‘ah)

⁵⁶ Author's note: The two shaykhs. Eds. 1-2 read the Hadith as: "No obedience to the creature in disobedience to the Creator" (no source given).

⁵⁷ Author's note, eds. 3-L: Al-Bukhari.

⁵⁸ Eds. 1-5 read "will" instead of "commands".

⁵⁹ Ed. 2 adds: "And the Apostle says:" (prefacing the quotation in ¶37).

what God has made sacred, violates the compact of God, disobeys the Sunnah of the Apostle of God, and acts with sin and enmity among the servants of God, and if he does not try to change him by deed or word, he shares his sins in God's sight."⁶⁰ This Hadith stipulates the duty of trying to change the ruler who is rebelling against the Shari'ah, by action or at least by speech. This is a further positive step beyond the negative step of withholding obedience.

38. We must distinguish between the ruler's undertaking to enforce the religious Shari'ah and his deriving his authority from a religious characteristic inherent in his person.⁶¹ The ruler has no religious authority that he receives directly from heaven, as was the case with some rulers of ancient times in the kind of government called "theocracy",⁶² but he becomes a ruler only by the absolutely free choice of the Muslims. They are not bound by any choice made by his predecessor,⁶³ nor is the position inherited within a family. Then after that his authority derives from his undertaking to enforce the Shari'ah of God without claiming for himself any right to initiate legislation by an authority of his own.⁶⁴ So, if the Muslims do not accept him he has no authority, and if they do accept him but then he abandons the Shari'ah of God, no obedience is due him.

39. In this we see the wisdom of the prophet – may God bless him and grant him

⁶⁰ Author's note, Ed. 1 only: Hadith.

⁶¹ Eds. 1-5 read "religion" instead of "commands".

⁶² Eds. 1-5 do not have: "in the kind of government called 'theocracy'".

⁶³ Translator's note: In the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties (661-1258 C.E.) the reigning caliph commonly designated his successor.

⁶⁴ Eds. 1-5 do not have: "of God without claiming . . . by an authority of his own".

peace – in that he did not appoint his successor (*khalîfah*) after him. Had he done so it might have given grounds for thinking that the successor derived a personal⁶⁵ religious authority from the fact that the prophet (SAW)⁶⁶ had chosen him.

40. Islam does not know any official "religious" body like the "clergy" of the Christian church. Islamic government is not something carried out by a specific official body; rather it is any form of government in which the Islamic Shari‘ah is enforced, and in which the ruler recognizes that sovereignty belongs to God alone and that his task is not to go beyond enforcing the Shari‘ah.⁶⁷ If the meaning of "religious government" in any religion is that a particular group is the one to take charge of government, then religious government is completely rejected in Islam, and there is no excuse for anyone to understand that government in Islam requires anything more than enforcing the Islamic Shari‘ah, after the recognition that God alone (S) has the right of sovereignty.⁶⁸

[Not in ed. 1.]

41. Every government that is based on the principle that God alone has sovereignty and then⁶⁹ enforces the Islamic Shari‘ah is Islamic government,⁷⁰ and every government that is not based on the recognition that God alone (S) has sovereignty and⁷¹ does not enforce this Shari‘ah, is not recognized by Islam, even if it is run by an official religious group or bears the name of Islamic. [Omitted from ed. 1.]

⁶⁵ Eds. 1-5 do not have "personal".

⁶⁶ Eds. 1-5 do not have "(SAW)".

⁶⁷ Eds. 2-5 omit: "and in which the ruler recognizes . . . not to go beyond enforcing the Shari‘ah".

⁶⁸ Eds. 2-5 read: "the Islamic law (*al-qânûn al-islâmî*)" instead of "the Islamic Shari‘ah, after the recognition . . . the right of sovereignty".

⁶⁹ Eds. 2-5 do not have: "that is based on the principle that God alone has sovereignty and then".

⁷⁰ Eds. 2-5 add: "whatever be the form or title of the government".

42. The obedience of the governed is to be given only if and as long as the ruler recognizes that government belongs only to God and then⁷² enforces the Shari‘ah of God without any other condition than just government and obedience to God.⁷³

[Omitted from ed. 1.]

43. (c) Consultation between the rulers and the ruled: "Take counsel with them in the affair"⁷⁴ . . . "Their affair is counsel between them."⁷⁵ So, consultation (*shûrâ*) is one of the principles of government in Islam, and it involves more than merely government, because it is fundamental to the life of the Muslim Ummah, as the verse shows.⁷⁶ As for the manner of consultation, no particular system has been specified, so its application is left to existing circumstances and needs. The Apostle (SAW)⁷⁷ used to consult with the Muslims on matters about which there was no revelation and accept their opinion on worldly matters in which they were more knowledgeable than he, such as battle positions and strategies. He listened to their opinions at the battle of Badr and encamped some distance away from it. He also listened to their opinion on digging the Trench, and he listened to them in the matter of the prisoners, against the opinion of ‘Umar, until a revelation came supporting ‘Umar. As for anything on which there was a revelation, then in the nature of the case there was no scope for

⁷¹ Eds. 2-5 do not have: "is not based on the recognition that God alone (S) has sovereignty and".

⁷² Eds. 2-5 do not have: "recognises that government belongs only to God and then".

⁷³ Eds. 2-5 read "Shari‘ah of Islam" instead of "Shari‘ah of God . . . and obedience to God".

⁷⁴ Author's note: Surat Al ‘Imran (3), 159.

⁷⁵ Author's note: Surat al-Shura (42), 38.

⁷⁶ Eds. 1-5 do not have: "and it involves . . . as the verse shows".

⁷⁷ Eds. 1-5 do not have "(SAW)".

consultation, since such matters are religiously settled and fixed.⁷⁸

44. Likewise the Caliphs used to consult the Muslims. Abu Bakr took consultation concerning those who withheld the Zakat, and then acted according to his view that they should be fought. At first ‘Umar opposed this, but then he accepted the view of Abu Bakr and was convinced by it, after God opened his mind to it and he saw that Abu Bakr was determined to do this.⁷⁹ Abu Bakr also consulted the people of Mecca concerning the war in Syria, in spite of the opposition of ‘Umar. ‘Umar also took consultation over the question of entering a plague-stricken country and came to an opinion; then he found a text from the Sunnah that supported him and so he kept to his course.⁸⁰ This consultation did not follow any established or formally defined system, because the practical circumstances determined who should be consulted (*ahl al-shûrà*) in each period so clearly that there was no uncertainty about it.⁸¹ In general there is ample space for various kinds of systems and methods which are not defined by Islam, as it is content to lay down the general principle [of consultation].

45. However, the Islamic movement in every period determines by its very nature who should be consulted (*ahl al-shûrà*) from among those with experience, prestige and good judgment, and it does so with an ease unknown in human systems. [Last ed. only.]

⁷⁸ Eds. 1-5 have in addition: "and were naturally reserved to the trustworthy Apostle".

⁷⁹ Translator's note: (This is the Wars of Riddah. There is a brief account on p. 31 of *Introducing Islam*.)

⁸⁰ Translator's note: (A plague in Emmaus in Syria in 639 CE. ‘Umar decided not to go there and some claimed he was fleeing the decree of God but he found a statement of the Prophet to the effect that one should not go to a plague-stricken area but if one is already there one should not leave it escape the plague.)

* * * *

46. The ruler therefore has no rights that do not belong to an individual Muslim - except for obedience to his command, advice, and assistance in enforcing the Shari‘ah.
[No change.]

47. Although the Prophet (SAW) was not only a ruler but also the one who brought the Shari‘ah and set the legal limits for the ruler within the sphere of the rights that Islam gives him, and his successors (*khulafâ’*) followed his prescriptions, as we shall see in the chapter on the historical reality [of Islam], he allowed people to take retribution from him when they had the right to it, unless they choose to forgive him. Once a creditor came to him and spoke harshly to him, and the Muslims became very upset, but he indicated that they should leave [the man] alone, since anyone with a case has the right to speak. He also said (SAW), "I have a right to only one-fifth of your booty, and that fifth is expended on you."⁸²

48. He said to his tribe and his relatives, "O Tribe of the Quraysh, you must purchase your own souls [by your good deeds]; I am no avail to you in God's presence. Oh ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib [his uncle], I am of no avail to you in God's presence. O Safiyyah, aunt of the Apostle of God, I am of no avail to you in

⁸¹ Eds. 1-5 read: "the circumstances of the age required only this sort of consultation" instead of "the practical circumstances . . . no uncertainty about it".

⁸² Author's note: Abu Da‘ud and al-Nasa‘i. Eds. 1-2 read: "Camels carrying Sadaqah passed by him and he stretched out his hand to a piece of cloth on one of the camels and said, 'I have no more right to this piece of cloth than any other of the Muslims'" instead of "He also said . . . that fifth is expended on you."

God's presence. O Fatimah, daughter of Muhammad, ask for whatever you wish of my possessions, but I am of no avail to you in the presence of God."⁸³ He said to 'Ali and Fatimah, the most beloved of people to him, "I cannot give to you and leave the poor members of the community with their bellies wracked by hunger." On [another] occasion he said to them, "I cannot serve you and leave the poor hungry."⁸⁴ He also said "Among the People of Israel the practice was that when one of their nobility stole they would not punish him, but if one of the lower class stole, they would cut off his hand. If Fatimah were to steal, I would cut off her hand."⁸⁵

49. Thus the ruler has no legal or financial rights beyond those of the ordinary Muslims, nor does his family.⁸⁶

50. No ruler may oppress people in either body or spirit, nor may he disrespect them, nor infringe on their possessions. If he enforces the punishments and obligations [of the Shari'ah], that is the limit of his authority over people, and God protects them from his authority [beyond that], in their spirits, bodies, honor, and possessions. [No change.]

51. Islam has safeguarded these spirits, bodies, honor and possessions by clear general commands, in such a form as to leave no doubt as to its concern to assure security, peace, and honor to all. [No change.]

⁸³ Author's note: Agreed upon. Eds. 1-2 omit: "He said to his tribe . . . in the presence of God."

⁸⁴ Author's note: Hadith number 596 from the *Musnad*, published by Professor Ahmad Muhammad Shakir.

⁸⁵ Author's note: Many narrators. Eds. 1-2, read "'He used to say to the Banu Hashim [his own clan], 'It is not proper that people seek my blessing by their [good] deeds, while you seek it through your ancestry,'" instead of "'and on [another] occasion . . . cut off her hand.'" "

52. "O believers, do not enter houses other than your own houses until you first ask leave and greet the people thereof."⁸⁷ . . . "And Do not spy."⁸⁸ and the Hadith, "The blood, honor, property of every Muslim is forbidden to every other Muslim"⁸⁹ . . . and a life for a life and retaliation for wounds.

* * * *

53. But while Islam limits the authority of the leader (*imâm*)⁹⁰ in matters concerning his person, it gives him the broadest possible authority in looking after the welfare (*masâlih mursalah*) of the community in those matters concerning which there is no authoritative text (*nass*) and which develop with new times and conditions. The general principle is that the Muslim leader (*imâm*) whose authority is based on the Shari‘ah of God⁹¹ may make as many new decrees as he finds new problems in order to carry out God's statement, "He has laid on you no impediment in your religion"⁹² and in order to achieve the general goals of Islam in improving the condition of the individual and of the community and of all humanity, within the bounds established in Islam and on the condition of justice, which must characterize

⁸⁶ Eds. 1-2 add (as a separate paragraph): "and that is Islam".

⁸⁷ Author's note: Surat al-Nur (24), 27. Eds. 1-5 add: "It is not piety to come to houses from behind [Author's note: Surat al-Baqarah (2), 189] . . . and "Enter houses by their doors" [Author's note: Surat al-Baqarah (2), 189].

⁸⁸ Author's note: Surat al-Hujarat (49), 12.

⁸⁹ Author's note, eds 3-L: The two shaykhs. Ed. 1, Hadith. Ed. 2 does not have this note.

⁹⁰ Eds. 1-5 read "ruler (*hâkim*)" instead of "leader (*imâm*)".

⁹¹ Eds. 1-5, read "the Sultan" instead of "Muslim leader whose authority is based on the Shari‘ah of God"; eds. 1-2 enclose "the Sultan may make as many new decrees as he finds new problems" in quotation marks.

⁹² Author's note: Surat al-Hajj (22), 78. Eds. 1-2 add: "and the statement of the Apostle 'No injury, and no retaliation.'"

the leader (*imâm*).

54. The leader (*imâm*)⁹³ must put an end to whatever causes any sort of harm to the community and he must undertake whatever brings benefit to the community, as long as he does not violate any of the authoritative religious texts (*nass*).

55. These are wide powers which cover all aspects of life. The achievement of social justice in all its forms is included within these powers. In the financial area, for example, the ruler may go beyond the obligation of Zakat and impose other taxes in order to achieve the proper balance and equilibrium, to eliminate ill-feeling and resentment, and to relieve the community of the evils of extreme luxury and hardship,⁹⁴ and of the accumulation of money on the hands of a few people, provided that he does not go against an authoritative text or a basic principle of Islamic life. For he may not strip people of all their possessions and leave them poor, or take control of their whole livelihood so that he can abase them and make them his slaves, thus depriving them of the ability to carry out their obligation to speak freely in advising him, to keep an alert watch over his actions, and to change whatever is objectionable whatever its source. Individuals cannot do this unless they have private sources of income which the leader (*imâm*) and his deputies do not control. The necks of slaves must bow to the one who owns their sources of income!

⁹³ Eds. 1-5, read "the Sultan" instead of "the leader".

⁹⁴ Eds. 1-5 do not have the rest of the paragraph as given in the text but end it as follows: "and of the evil of inflation . . . along with all other considerations that justify initiative on the part of the ruler". (The addition in the last edition may be taken as a criticism of increased role of the state in the economy under Abdel Nasser.)

56. The actual history of the Islamic community includes many examples of this care for the broadly defined welfare (*masâlih mursalah*⁹⁵) of the community, without forsaking the basic principles of Islamic life that we have indicated. It may be applied at any time, since Islam is not a rigidified system and its detailed application is not limited to any one age or one environment. Islam only wants to affirm the basic Islamic principles whose features are defined by God, to keep Muslim society from being absorbed into the Jahili societies, and to preserve its ability to lead these societies which it came to lead.⁹⁶

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57. So far we have dealt with the "legal" aspect of government in Islam, but beyond this is the "voluntary" aspect in which moral guidance goes beyond what the legislation requires, after the manner of Islam in all its requirements and systems.⁹⁷

58. Thus government in Islam is based more on conscience than on legislation. It is based on the fact that God is present at every moment with both the ruler and the ruled, watching over both. "Any servant to whom God puts in charge of a flock, if he fails to guide it well, he will never see a trace of Paradise."⁹⁸ . . . "Consume not your goods

⁹⁵ This is described in *Introducing Islam* as a form of *maslaha* that is unrestricted (p. 128). Qutb discusses this concept in some detail elsewhere in this book.

⁹⁶ Eds. 1-5 read: "which may be applied at any time. Detailed examples will be given in the appropriate place. The important thing is to affirm here that Islam is not a rigid system, and its application is not limited to any one age or one environment," instead of "without forsaking . . . which it came to lead".

⁹⁷ Eds. 1-5 add: "It legislates the minimum requirements but seeks higher achievements by moral guidance, and it leaves a wide space between these levels in which man may rise as high as he can."

⁹⁸ Author's note, eds. 3-L: The two shaykhs. Ed. 1: Hadith. Ed. 2 does not this note.

between you in vanity; neither proffer it to the judges, that you may sinfully consume a portion of other men's goods, and that wittingly."⁹⁹ [No change.]

59. The shepherd and the flock both require the supervision of God in all that they do, and it is the fear of God that is the final guarantee of the establishment of justice. We have already seen that Islam entrusts to the properly trained human conscience great responsibilities in matters of both law and economics. If there is no fear of God in that conscience then there is no guarantee, for the law can always be twisted or evaded, and the ruler, the judge and the people can be deceived. [No change.]

60. One is not to understand from this that the Islamic social system is based upon conscience alone, but what must be understood is that Islam has another guarantee besides that of mere legislation, and this gives it an advantage - in terms of actual achievement¹⁰⁰ - over systems that rely only on legislation, without support from the conscience or the feelings. [Lacking in eds. 1-2.]

61. We shall see later that this conscience that Islam fosters and trains has accomplished momentous things that seem like miracles, in the life of the Muslims down through the ages. [No change.]

⁹⁹ Author's note: Surat al-Baqarah (2), 188.

¹⁰⁰ Eds. 3-5 do not have: "in terms of actual achievement".