

Nationalism and Cultural Pluralism in Contemporary Arab Thought

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Issues involved in pluralism and assimilation have been debated all over the Arab world throughout the 20th century, especially after the First World War. Lebanon hosted the lion's share of this debate by reason of the diversity of its demographic, religious and cultural make up. On the margins of the struggle for political and economic control certain slogans emerged and all parties used them as instruments for concentrating force, gathering power, repelling and alienating enemies. Some of the slogans were essentially unifying: 'sharing life' (*al-'aysh al-mushtarak*) between Muslims and Christians, 'the Muslim-Christian encounter' (*at-talâqî al-islâmî al-*

masîhî), Arabness (*al-‘urûbah*). Against these were slogans about ‘Phoenicianism’ (*al-fînîqiyyah*) or ‘Mediterraneanism’ (*al-mutawassitiyyah*).

Muslims in Lebanon considered it a purely Arab country and saw its people as one people no matter their religious diversity. Oriental Arab Christians — Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian Christians — were all Arabs, pure and simple. There was no reason to pose cultural or political distinctions.

Nonetheless Christians of the cultural elite were anxious about their status within this assimilationist solution. They took to developing notions about the uniqueness of Syria, or Lebanon’s Phoenicianism, Canaanitism or Mediterraneanism, or they argued that Lebanon was separated from Syria on the East by mountains, or they said that Lebanon was uniquely a land of freedom for all those seeking a asylum, a refuge for minorities throughout history, minorities that found sanctuary in Lebanon’s mountains, fleeing Arab or Muslim domination. A

caricature of this was provided by Fr. Salîm 'Abo (later rector of Beirut's Jesuit university in the 1970s). In 1959 he published a book about linguistic distinctions. In it he argued that the distinctiveness of Lebanese Christians was manifested linguistically. Christians throughout history, he said, had always spoken languages other than Arabic!

With the horrendous strategic retreats of the 1950s and 1960s the Arab nationalist elite came to the conclusion that there was one nation and one people. This ruled out any notion of diversity or pluralism. This nationalist notion was not only promoted by the rise of Arab Nationalism and its various ambitions within the Arab world, it was also served by political Islamism that, in the teeth of reality, urged Muslims to buy into the Lebanese sectarian system.

Thus when Christian sectarian loyalties coalesced to protect the autonomy of Lebanon from the incursions of Arab Nationalism that threatened the privileged position of Christians in Lebanon, the Arab nationalist and the

‘Arabized’ elite came to insist upon the slogan, ‘living as one’ (*al-‘aysh al-wâhid*), seeing Lebanon as part of a monolithic Arab nation. This gave rise to the Ba‘ath Party, Syrian nationalism and the Nâsirites(1). Following the breakup between Syria and Egypt in 1967, nationalist youth and leftist Lebanese enrolled in cadres of the Palestinian resistance that were part of the PLO under the leadership of Yâsir ‘Arafât because they believed that the Palestinian cause was *the* pivotal cause of the Arabs and that Lebanon was the ideal ground whereon to do battle against Israel.

Clearly, when it broke out in 1975, the Lebanese civil war cannot be blamed on the disjunction between the two competing slogans, ‘sharing life’ (*al-‘aysh al-mushtarak*) and ‘living as one’ (*al-‘aysh al-wâhid*). The main burden rests with the Palestinian issue that pressed itself upon Lebanese political society, and with internal Lebanese problems including the disparate notions about what constituted Lebanese identity and its broader commitments.

Nonetheless notions of pluralism — what was possible and what was not — certainly played a prominent role in shattering the political will. The political authority was stymied; it could not move one way or the other. During the Lebanese civil war that followed — as in all similar wars such as those in Spain or Greece or the Second World War or the Balkan conflicts in the 1980s and 1990s — all weapons of cold and hot war were deployed. In all Arab countries (Lebanon among them) this crippled the Arab nationalist notion of political pluralism. At the same time their opponents became more alarmed. For instance, Christian ideologues in Lebanon even gave to secularism (a quintessentially assimilationist doctrine) a spin that sustained the Lebanese sectarian operating system that had survived from the days of the French mandate. Both Arab nationalist and leftist spokespersons for the Lebanese national movement demanded the dissolution of the ‘political sectarianism’. Christians, for their part, responded that either full and unqualified secularism be implemented (which Muslims

would not accept) or else the system be retained as is.

Then, in the wake of events in the mid-1970s, serious discussions took place in Lebanon concerning national coexistence within a framework of cultural and political pluralism. But even in the Tâ'if Agreement sectarian mechanisms were retained. Put another way, pluralism remained sectarian and not political. Even though the new constitution spoke of 'sharing life', it was in a religious and not a political context. This explains former President Salîm al-Huss's remark that in Lebanon there is much freedom but little democracy. The Maronite Patriarch — as the slogan, 'Abolish political sectarianism!' made a comeback — observed that sectarianism had to be purged from the soul first and then from the texts. The late Pope John-Paul II, speaking both during the Christian Synod for Lebanon and during his visit to Lebanon in 1997, put forward his argument regarding current slogan, 'sharing life', that Lebanon was more than a country, it was a mission. This, he argued, was

primarily because of the unique encounter within it of Christian and Muslim cultures.

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It might not be very profitable to backtrack as we try to puzzle out the problematics of coexistence, national unity and pluralism in Arab countries these days. Situations have changed dramatically since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Above, I posed Lebanon as an example of the debates, up until the 1970s, that dealt with society, state and political culture. For many scholars, however, Lebanon represents a special case. It cannot be generalized. So perhaps the question that should be posed is: Has the assimilationism of radical nationalism exacerbated sectarian and ethnic divisions such as those we now see in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and other Arab countries? The second question is: What role has Arab nationalism played in crippling political pluralism or political parties and their democratic potential over the past forty years?

The Arab nationalist idea has not known any really great visionaries. Nonetheless we may still discuss how Sâti‘ al-Husrî, Antûn Sa‘âdî, Mishayl ‘Aflaq, and Zakî al-Arsûzî constructed a nationalist or corporate theory for Arab societies and how they could be marshaled under the nationalist banner, no matter their diversity. The basic assumptions of this construction, in general terms, were cultural, linguistic and historical. But this construction did not have much impact upon public perceptions. People could not distinguish between a homogeneous and a non-homogeneous nation. Ordinary people were concerned about unity as such more than about the ‘national consciousness’ that the nationalist ideologues were convinced was the precondition for the Arab renaissance.

The debate between the Ba‘athists and the Nâsirites during the 1960s illustrates my point. The Ba‘athists, for their part, spoke of a ‘disciplined union’ while the Nâsirites spoke of the faith of the Arab masses in unity. Differences in phraseology notwithstanding,

the foundation of the two views was the same. Both parties believed that the cultural and historical consensus was rock-solid. Were it shown not to exist, the mission of the eternal nation itself would cease to exist. The question arises: Do the nationalists recognize the existence of factions or classes within the nation to give breathing space or sanction for political pluralism or multi-party activity?

The nationalist ideologues recognized the existence of factions, and, when in the 1960s they became leftists, they also spoke of classes. But factions or classes were simply mirror images of each other so far as the Arab nationalists were concerned. The upshot was that there was no call for competing political parties. What was needed was that the people rally around the leading party or the individual leader who, uniquely, represented the interests of all factions. The doctrinaire position of nationalists throughout the Arab world and internationally was that the leader was the linchpin for fulfilling the nationalist agenda. Thus the force of the working class rallied

around the Nâsirist position, and, in Syria, attached itself to the Progressive National Front. What illustrated the complete union of the people was the existence of a leading party or of a leader — one or the other — who represented everyone without there being any need for a political party.

Was doctrinaire nationalism really responsible for the political reduction of everything into the person of the leader? The fact of the matter is that the Cold War and leftist or progressive ideologies in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s were also responsible for ‘corporatizing’ Arab politics. What I mean is that the doctrine of ‘the homogeneous society’ could have strengthened partisan or political pluralism without fear of factional strife. That was more obvious in Egypt and Morocco than in Syria and Iraq. But what happened during the polarizations of the Cold War — intensified during the early 1960s — was that, from leadership to leadership, single party rule was reinforced. The Soviet Union bred regimes in its own image and was

prepared to support any regime that leaned in its direction, taking no account of internal politics.

Egyptian scholars do not like to link Egypt to this particular line of development. They prefer to talk about the 'national community' as a phenomenon peculiar both to Egypt's past and to its present. So far as they are concerned, sectarian divisions do not plague Egyptian society. Furthermore, their political parties are not based on sectarian considerations as is the case in Lebanon and even in Morocco. As for the fragility of the movement it is not only to be accounted for by the monolithic nature of the political regime; it has to do with the extent to which society has developed and diversified. The party evolves from new factions. Its ideas and structure do not stem from traditional ways of organizing things in Arab and Islamic societies. The 'Wafd' party, up until the revolution of July 23, 1952, was successful because, unlike the Communist or Islamic parties, it had no fixed structure.

For the moment let us return to the issue of national life, national unity and the viability of political pluralism in this context. We have in an earlier phase, for example, Mu‘ammar al-Qaddâfi’s comment: “Whoever hives off into partisanship is a traitor.” This idea is highlighted in his *Green Book*. It is thought that this idea has traditional Arab and Islamic roots or, if it is new, it is only relatively so. Medieval Muslim societies knew they were diverse in makeup. Their unity was realized under the overarching commonwealth. The pluralism of their social and cultural structures was shaded under that umbrella. That worked even for smaller states up until they were absorbed into empires — the Ottoman, the Uzbek, the Moghul and the Safavid. Even as late as the days of Sultân ‘Abd-ul-Hamîd II [b.1842-d.1918], nobody ever thought that the proliferation of small states would lead to the breakup of the Muslim commonwealth, or to the proliferation of Sûfî orders. No one thought it would lead to the breakup of society, or that the proliferation of schools of

religious legislation would lead to religious meltdown.

During the days of ‘Abd-ul-Hamîd II awareness of the ‘Muslim Community’ was emphasized. That meant, at least symbolically, the unification of the ‘Muslim commonwealth’ with the ‘Ottoman state’ in much the same sense as nationalism was then seen in Europe. From that time on effort was expended to inculcate the notion of ‘Ottoman nationality’ with the citizen as its base. It tried to side-step notions of religious or ethnic unity that were implausible given their proliferation at the time. For all that, even after the Ottoman state and its shards collapsed following the First World War, and the Caliphate was abolished in 1924, the notion of unity did not die. It became an ethnic, religious, geographic and political ideal. At that point the notion of homogeneity and how far it could go without challenging nationalist sentimentalities reached something of a climax.

In 1976, when the first stage of Lebanon's civil war was most intense, the Arab Cultural Club — Lebanon's and Beirut's oldest nationalist club — published a book on the proceedings of a conference on "Lebanon: Living As One". Simultaneously a conference in Sayyidat-ul-Bîr (a Christian monastery) published a document focused upon "Cultural Disjunction" and dealt with pluralism in its broad sweep, drawing in everything from politics to home nurture. It was very odd that, while the Lebanese nationalists and leftists were calling for democracy based upon social solidarity, the Christians seemed never to have heard of the term, 'democracy'. Their extreme voices spoke of two societies; there was really no such thing as one Lebanese people. 'Shared living' was something applied only where the two disparate societies were unavoidably mutually involved.

In point of fact most Christians were not 'dissimilationists'; their elite were also nationalists and leftists. The competing

slogans were intended to obscure the civil conflict then in full swing, and concerning whose goals and causes there was no consensus even within each individual party. The conflict began when the nationalists hived off to support the Palestinian resistance movement. For their part, the politicians and Christian political parties saw Palestinian armed resistance as one of the factors of national breakup leading step-wise to Israel's invading and destroying Lebanon.

As we have earlier remarked, however, Lebanon is a special case. One should not compare it to other situations at that time or even those of today. The Palestinian environment in Lebanon, gathering as it did all factions of the PLO, was a true representation of the nationalist, leftist and even the Islamist strands that ran through the Arab world during the 1970s. In FATAH were gathered the three main strands — the Islamist, the nationalist and the leftist. It is known that most of the founders of the FATAH movement had primarily Islamist tendencies or had,

originally, been part of the Muslim Brotherhood either because, up until 1954, they had been present and active in Egypt, or later joined it, or came to sympathize with it in Kuwait during the 1950s and 1960s.

I recall it was in 1977, while sitting in on a discussion among FATAH partisans, that I first heard a discussion of pluralism or diversity. One expressed opinion held there was no call for pluralism, diversity or disagreement so long as the problem was focused and not controversial — the liberation of Palestine. Those expressing this view then cited *qur'ânic* references and passages from the *Sunnah* that forbade controversy, going on to note examples of reprehensible controversy in the ideas expressed by other Palestinian organizations. But, although a minority voice, there were those present who said that political pluralism held no danger but expressed the differing perspectives of individuals concerning the common cause. Different groups have their own interests and that implies the need for various parties and

organizations. The real danger, they noted, was in arguing for *cultural* pluralism; that implied serious divisions among the people and within the nation.

This is the line of reasoning put forward by moderate Islamists who, following the 1970s, were known as the movements of political Islam. At the time of which we speak there were no legally recognized Muslim parties except in Jordan. Although the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan did not then ascribe to political pluralism, nonetheless it participated in the electoral process, had representatives in the Jordanian parliament and even some ministers in the government.

At the same time the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt refused to think of itself as a political party. They chose the name, ‘The Muslim Brotherhood Community’ (*jamâ‘at-ul-ikhwân al-muslimîn*). That choice goes back to 1952-1953 when the Brotherhood participated with the Free Officers in the July revolution. The revolution, however, during its first few months, ‘rewarded’ the Brotherhood by

refusing them representation as a political party. They were identified as a missionary and benevolent religious society and not as a political party. But in 1954, after the Manshiyyah incident in Alexandria, when Muhammad ‘Abd-ul-Latîf, a member of a secret Brotherhood group, tried to assassinate Gamâl ‘Abd-un-Nâsir, the society was proscribed, and other members known to the police were arrested. The ban stands to this day even though a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since those days in the early 1970s.

With the exception of Jordan, what happened to the Brotherhood in Egypt (the largest Muslim political body in the Arab world) has happened to similar groups in all Arab countries. But there was a consensus among all Islamist groups in the 1950s and 1960s and even the 1970s that cultural pluralism was religiously proscribed; and if political pluralism was not quite forbidden, it was frowned upon. God Almighty said, “This is your nation. It is one nation. I am your Lord.

Worship!” (*Qur’ân, Sûrah 21:92*) The term, ‘party’ (*hizb*), appeared in the *Qur’ân* as a term of censure, a negative idea. What was important, though, was the ideological and cultural foundation. There would be one ideology that demanded the nation, the state and society be one. There was an aspect of perplexity about religious pluralism. The *Qur’ân* declared that, within the body of Muslim society, there were Christians and Jews who differed from Muslims both religiously and culturally.

The Muslim Brotherhoods in Egypt and Syria dealt with this historical conundrum differently. Under the leadership of Mustafâ as-Sabâ’î, the Brotherhood in Syria — that enjoyed a modicum of freedom and recognition between when Syria gained independence and up until the union with Egypt in 1958 — supported the idea of religious pluralism so long as the over-all leadership of society was recognized to be Islamic, it being the majority religion. Essentially, they held the same view as the

Arab nationalists. They did not think of religious pluralism as implying cultural pluralism. So far as they were concerned, Arab Christians shared the same culture with Muslims. There was therefore no excuse for encouraging Christian cultural organizations or Christian political parties. The Muslim Brothers in Jordan and Palestine concurred.

For its part, the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon (that, as of 1963, called itself ‘the Muslim Coalition’), affected by Egyptian influences, lagged behind with respect to the issues of pluralism until the 1980s. But — both from a nationalist and an Islamist perspective — Taqî-ud-Dîn an-Nabahânî, founder of the Liberation Party influenced this notion of homogeneity in Syria. An-Nabahânî called for the revival of the Caliphate. Beginning in 1953 he condemned the notions of cultural and political pluralism. Ever since he founded his party he thought of it as ‘the Party of the Caliphate’. He denied the idea of democracy and the principle of the rule of the majority. In his view, there was no legitimacy

for any authority other than the authority of the Caliph. That was to be achieved through an act of fealty (*bay'ah*) and not through elections or a vote.

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The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt did not have a positive experience with the Egyptian regime, be that in the days of the monarchy or during the republic. For this reason, during the monarchy, their stance with regard to cultural, social and political pluralism was a vacillating one, but during the days of Gamâl 'Abd-un-Nâsir it was outright negative. And that is evident, from the 1940s through the mid-1960s, in the writings of Hasan al-Bannâ, 'Abd-ul-Qâdir 'Awdah, and Sayyid Qutub. For his part, Hasan al-Bannâ was not really a theoretician, and he had no liking for confrontation with the Egyptian political regime. He always focused his opposition against the party of the majority, the Wafd party. His attitude toward the notion of 'the majority' or 'the community' — the name of his own group notwithstanding — was always

vague or tentative. Historically it is clear that the term ‘community’ (*jamâ‘ah*) stands over against the term ‘dissension’ (*fitnah*). In many texts ‘community’ simply means consensus (*ijmâ‘*). And we must not forget that the Sunnîs, for the past nine centuries, have been the Muslim majority and think of themselves as ‘the people of the Prophet’s tradition and the community’s consensus’ (*ahl-us-sunnah wa al-jama‘ah*).

It is not surprising, therefore, that this rather large revivalist group thought it represented Islam in Egypt and also, as it struck root in other regions, throughout the Arab world. Nonetheless, the truth of the matter is that this so-called ‘community’ remained a marginal group politically and organizationally. It had little impact upon public culture and awareness, either religiously or in terms of education. It also had little political impact. For all that, the Muslim Brotherhood was a new group in the system. Its very self-confidence had an impact upon on all subsequent Islamist organizations. They all

adhered to the principle of obedience to the commander (or prince ... *amîr*) and the person in charge (*waliyy-ul-amr*). Conventionally, that person was the head of the consensual community (*al-jamâ'ah*) and even its founder.

With the exception of Jordan, where the Muslim Brotherhood had a dual loyalty (both to the king and to the spiritual guide of the community), in all other Arab countries the Brotherhood expressed its fealty only to its 'commander' or head of the consensual community (*ra's-ul-jamâ'ah*). Furthermore, in addition to their having no enthusiasm for pluralism, the political environment did not promote it either. Add to that the Islamist political doctrine of the 1960s that there should be a Muslim state enforcing the so-called Islamic *Sharî'ah*. It was a call emanating not just from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood but from all the so-called 'revivalists' in the Arab world, in Pakistan and the rest of the Muslim world.

In the teeth of the ideological and political setbacks of the 1960s that also affected the

Syrian Brotherhood, its positive experience with the Syrian regime in the 1950s was something its leadership remembered. Prominent among these was Muhammad al-Mubârak who, although he rigorously opposed cultural pluralism, had the courage to speak out for political pluralism. The position of the Egyptian Brotherhood did not begin to gradually shift until after the mid-1970s and the outbreak of struggle between them and extremist factions that had largely peeled off from the main body because of its position toward the Egyptian government and its stance on the use of violence. The Egyptian Muslim Brothers did not actually express a frank opinion on the legitimacy of the existing Egyptian regime, but they forbade violence and bloodshed, rejected violent revolution, and, without expressing a clear view regarding political and party-based pluralism, they expressed their readiness to participate in the electoral process.

Toward the end of the 1970s quite a few writers emerged who either had roots in the

Brotherhood or had Islamist credentials. Reversing field from positions they had previously held, they developed a perspective on pluralism and difference making liberal use of references to the Holy *Qur'ân*. As Muhammad 'Ammârah, Fahmî Huwaidî, and Muhammad Salîm al-'Awwâ argued, nature is diverse, people differ in characteristics, religions and cultures, and this social and cultural differentiation results in political pluralism. This diversity notwithstanding, society continues to have internal cohesion. Many of these Islamist writers argued that Egypt is distinctive — both in its past and in its present — as regards its social solidarity. Thus, as Târiq al-Bishrî expressed it, one can speak of the consensual body of the nation (*al-jamâ'ah al-wataniyyah*), it being understood that this is established on the notion of citizenship within which culture is one even though religious and political pluralism still pertain. Even though the Brotherhood in Egypt has never abandoned the doctrine of a Muslim state that applies the *Sharî'ah*, through alliances with the Wafd party (that was

eventually dissolved) and then with the Labor Party (both legally recognized), it managed to place scores of its members in the Egyptian parliament.

In 1994 the Brotherhood published a document supporting democracy. No sooner had it done so, however, then it retracted or simply ignored it. That drove a number of its younger members to split off. They tried to form a ‘non-religious party’ under the name, The Party of the Center (*hizb-ul-wasat*). The Egyptian government has yet to grant their right to establish a political party since, according to the constitution, it is a religious party and religious parties are not allowed. But there are also a variety of other reasons for withholding recognition from the Party of the Center.

In 2002 the main group published another manifesto that spoke of a secular state (*dawlah madaniyyah*) and its political and partisan pluralism. In 2004 and 2005, without seeking allies, they tried again to become a factor in Egyptian politics. They published political

statements and organized demonstrations calling for political and trade-union freedoms, or protesting what was happening in Palestine and Iraq, or demanding that the emergency laws be struck down, or, on the eve of the Egyptian presidential election, that the constitution be revised. During one demonstration they even lifted up copies of the *Qur'ân* and, recently, during negotiations among parties in the opposition to hammer out a coalition against the ruling party, they insisted they be distinguished under the slogan, "Islam is the Solution!" Furthermore, in recent parliamentary elections and in spite of the Egyptian regime's harsh response against them, they managed to place about a hundred members in parliament. This came as a big surprise. Even the security and political measures surrounding the ballot boxes could not hide the fact. It was a manifest 'victory' that has riveted attention. It has raised anxieties among non-religious organizations and political parties.

For its part, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, now in exile, has continued in recent years to publish statements advocating freedom, democracy and pluralism. But it is not known what developments there have been within the organization since their dreadful clash with the Syrian regime from 1978 to 1983 that left tens of thousands dead and, in whose wake, further tens of thousands in exile. During the crisis their prominent leader, Sa'îd Hawwâ, spoke out against secularism, sectarianism, oppression and democracy all in the same breath.

In Lebanon, following the Civil War, the Muslim Brotherhood participated in elections for the Council of Deputies. Their current leader, Shaykh Faysal al-Mawlawî, has expressed moderate views on national coexistence and democracy, but they have said nothing on the issues of the state, the *Sharî'ah*, the current regime and a pluralistic society. But their historic leader, Fathî Yakan, is known to have said that while it was possible to participate in elections for the Council of

Deputies (a deputy, after all, can always remain a critic in opposition), it would be impossible to participate in the Council of Ministers since that would mean unreservedly accepting the legitimacy of the regime.

Having participated in government with few qualms, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan has seen its unity shattered and its participation in government compromised. It has run upon the rocks of the Palestinian issue, the government's peace treaty with Israel, and the split within its ranks between Palestinian and Jordanian members.

Hamâs, a spin-off from the Jordanian Brotherhood, right up until three months before the Palestinian elections was torn between whether to participate in the political process or pursue the armed struggle against Israeli occupation. I listened to Muhammad az-Zahhâr speaking on a television program and commenting upon the document agreed upon by Palestinian organizations and dealing with the elections late last year. One of its articles stipulated the neutrality of the

mosques. For az-Zahhâr that meant muzzling any advocacy of loyalty or right action. On the basis of az-Zahhâr's principle, greatly stressed by traditionalists (*salafiyyûn*), there would be no room for political or any other sort of pluralism. Over the past two decades the Salafîs (traditionalists), in their ideas and manner of life, have mesmerized the minds and hearts of many Brotherhood members in Palestine, Jordan and The Yemen. We now know that, although Islamic Jihâd refused, the Hamâs movement did, indeed, participate in the Palestinian elections and gained a majority in their National Council over FATH. The electoral success of Hamâs cannot but have an impact upon its attitude toward democracy even if its government is unsuccessful in holding power.

The experience of Hasan at-Turâbî in The Sudan is both unique and checkered. And it may be that, with the possible exception of Algeria, all Islamist experiences will be negative. Algerian Islamists never achieved power in government. Hasan at-Turâbî, on the

other hand, was part of the government during the an-Numayrî era. He even called Numayrî ‘Commander of the Faithful’(2). He then participated with the military officers in the coup that ended the democratic experiment (1985-1989). He dominated that regime until early 2000. He supported the idea of one party rule (that of *his* party, of course), and conducted a fierce war against rebels in South Sudan on the principle of there being only one religion and political system. Suddenly, toward the end of the 1990s he opened negotiations and then concluded an alliance with John Gurang. Not long thereafter he was imprisoned by some of his erstwhile students in the military. Now he says that he leads an opposition party in the cause of a government he would like to see as both pluralistic and democratic.

There is a main thread that links all Islamists in the Arab world. It opposes both violence and dictatorship. Its popularity gains for it between 30% and 40% of the electorate’s votes in several countries. For the most part it

has no coherent or persuasive vision for nation building, or for cultural and political pluralism. This trend of thought clearly holds no promise for adapting to future change. Perhaps it has more in common with the Christian democratic parties in Europe that sprang up after the Second World War. Without a doubt, after fifty years of struggle, this result has disappointed many hopes.

5

Since the 1900s Arab intellectuals embroiled themselves in combating two theses, one by Francis Fukuyama in his book, *The End of History*, and the other by Samuel Huntington in his *The Clash of Civilizations*. Obvious differences between the two notwithstanding, in fact the two arguments complemented each other. The first proclaimed the sweeping victory of democracy and liberalism, while the second argued that there were centers of backwardness and difference that still constituted obstacles to this victory. In the forefront of these were Confucianism/Buddhism (China, Japan and

countries of the Far East) and Islam (with its unquenchable thirst for blood). Huntington said that the battles still continued but their nature had changed; they had become cultural. He went on to say that the contemporary world contained six or seven surviving civilizations or cultures. The central pillar of each one was a specific religion.

Once you have truly grasped Samuel Huntington's thesis you can understand why Arabs and Muslims are indignant. In essence it predicts that there will be a global conflict ignited by the aggressiveness of Islam and Muslims and, in that light, it made Muslims preemptive targets. But the problem is that the Arab Islamists who rose in haste to oppose this inane thesis of Huntington's had for over four decades argued that the conflict between Islam and the West is a cultural conflict. Like their western neo-con counterparts, they superimpose cultural factors upon disagreements and divisions. But the fact of the matter is that the current conflict is driven by political, economic and strategic factors; it

has nothing to do with either religion or culture. Whatever the case, the Islamists have responded with long and disingenuous monologues on Islam's smiley-face in contrast to the West's aggressive scowl.

But this is not what concerns us here. My point is that if, on the part of both parties, the conflict focuses upon culture and identity, that means creating for both an environment unfriendly to democracy and pluralism. It is worth speculating that this may have been behind the retreat of Islamists from their moderate stance in 1994. Since 1998 we have been under the boot of the extremists, their arguments and their attacks, or the responses to them and the efforts to get beyond them. This all takes place under the slogan of 'Islam'. The combatants tell us that what drives them is Islam. From the Muslim side, they are responding to Crusader or Jewish aggression. For their part, the Americans, the British and the Europeans say they are responding militarily and culturally to extremist Islam. All they want to do is help us

regain Islam in its moderate expression. Read the matter as you like, but we have already noted that there are significant portions of the general public and the cultural elite who see the Americans and Europeans as belaboring or attacking Islam. Whoever the spin-doctors are, persuaded they are 'under threat', it is hard to open up dialogue. Furthermore it is hard to speak easily about a pluralism that reassures people about their identity, their unity and the stability of their society.

In response to the prominent Orientalist, Bernard Lewis, who was urging it, a prominent Arab official said that pluralism only opened the door to more dissension and division. For this reason the 1990s was a period of stagnation. The various Arab regimes were in stasis mode. For their part the Islamists, given their strong doubts about democracy, did not know what to do. The liberals and secularists, meanwhile, were trying to promote and implement the notion of a secular society. Surely the call for a secular society held promise for pluralism and

democracy, but it also ‘smelled’ like westernization. It was also ineffective as a dynamic idea to reshape the state or strengthen the political parties.

Then there came the holocaust of September 11, 2001. Everything changed. The region tripped up by stagnation stumbled into disaster. The United States, its allies and the whole world mounted a war against Islamist terrorism. On that excuse, it invaded Afghanistan and also Iraq. But in addition to the physical war, the Americans and the Europeans also wanted to launch ‘the war of ideas’, promoting freedom, democracy and pluralism. In line with this objective many meetings were organized in the West, and thousands of writers and researchers addressed it.

Encouraged to do so internationally, Arab literati published papers on political reform, on pluralism and on democracy because, within the framework of the overall objective, came the goal of vindicating moderate Islam. Many studies appeared painting a stark picture of

Islam being abraded by criticism and subjected to reassessment. Thus there were those who not only advocated political pluralism but *cultural* pluralism as well. But the events and terrifying repercussions of the invasion of Iraq also had their impact, especially the shocking divisions that emerged in the wake of the fall of the Iraqi government. Many feared one of two things might happen, each with historical precedent: either there would arise a new dictatorship, or Iraq would plunge into chaos fueled in the name of religion or tribe.

Most educated Arabs did not take issue with the American thesis as such. Some said that the Americans have an agenda in this ‘war of ideas’. They want to use it to mask their invasion. Others said that freedom and democracy cannot be imposed; they must come from within. Most Arab intellectuals still insist that the American invasion of Iraq has failed. No democracy will emerge, not even a semblance thereof. But they have, at the same time, become more passionate about political change. The initiatives of civil society and

human rights groups have had an impact upon political parties. In recent years what has become crystal clear is that the Islamists have drawn ahead of secular politicians on two fronts: First, they have accepted to participate in the electoral process whatever form it might take, even if its implementation does not meet minimal standards. Second comes the activity of self-criticism and reassessment. Islamists are recasting their positions on the basis of their experience, taking note of past mistakes and subjecting previously adopted positions to critical reassessment.

True, Islamists still have among them those who view the ‘philosophy’ of democracy with skepticism, seeing it as liberalism that raises the human person to divine status and that obliterates the difference between truth and falsehood. But many others see no objection to these sorts of abrasive encounters so long as the objective is to endow the people with the right to determine their own affairs without submitting to some sort of revolutionary vanguard. Jamâl al-Bannâ, in his book

Pluralism in Muslim Society, reviewed the matter through a fresh interpretation of the *Qur'ân*. But Râshid al-Ghannûshî, leader of the Islamists in Tunisia, sees no reason for that. From al-Ghannûshî's perspective, what is needed is simply to found a politically pluralistic society that, within itself, aims to fulfill all its programs and interests. There is no need to refer to Islam's position on differences concerning tertiary matters. This echoed the position of those who, in the late 1970s, had the gall to talk about the authority of the Islamic consensus (*al-ijmâ'*) as an alternative to the *Sharî'ah* that Islamists had been advocating since the 1960s.

With respect to a national coexistence and pluralism we now look upon a whole new phenomenon. For the first time it is doubtful whether a 'new contract' is possible between social groupings and existing regimes. Profound fears that unity or stability are under threat are justified. Societies are severely shaken when political regimes fall or are placed under severe stress. Then there is the

fear of the ‘American imbecility’ that yesterday was ready to invade any country in the cause of democracy, and today wants to strike down another in order to prevent it. There is absolutely no doubt that America’s message in its program for democracy in the ‘broader Middle East’ or the ‘new Middle East’ has had absolutely no beneficial impact. The same can be said for the assistance it gives to civil society and for its broad diplomatic forays in the region. There is profound bitterness in the air, in minds and in hearts, over what is happening in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon, and over how democracy has been transformed into a boogeyman for frightening established regimes without there being any serious effort actually to realize it. The results of recent elections in Egypt and Palestine only illustrate this.

Within the ranks of political Islam ‘Muslim moderation’ has not become the vanguard or the cutting edge for pluralism. The question is, why? After all, do not Muslim moderates constitute the majority?

Having gotten beyond its hard-line stance of the 1970s, for the past two decades contemporary Islamist thought is passing through a delicate phase. In the early 1980s the issue of pluralism came to be described as strictly a political matter. It was then that some Islamists in Egypt, Pakistan and Indonesia adopted or at least recognized party politics, the diversity of political parties, and the possibility of peaceful rivalry for power. This was no easy achievement given the somewhat disjointed nature of the Islamist notion of partisan politics or how Muslims should organize political parties.

In the 1950s and 1960s the theory of Islamic sovereignty was put forward, in the broader Muslim context, by al-Mawdûdî and by Sayyid Qutub in the Arab context. That thesis became the central idea for all Islamist groups. In a nutshell, it says that Islam is God's religion on earth, and therefore it must be the supreme authority for the whole political structure. Thus the true Muslim state is one

that applies the *Sharî‘ah* and that constitutes sort of direct divine government or a religious ‘nomocracy’(3). This implies that the role of Islamists who are members of political parties is simply to re-impose Islam (its ritual, legislative and political aspects) upon society and the state. The bone of contention at the time had to do with application: Did violating the *Sharî‘ah* apply against all historically Muslim societies, or did it only apply against governments actually in power? The radicals called for declaring that both society and the state be labeled blasphemous; the so-called moderates among them argued that blasphemy should only be laid at the door of the state.

When, in the 1980s, Islamists re-examined their position on working within the political environment of Muslim societies, accepting thereby political pluralism, they at first did not abandon the notion of Islamic sovereignty. For them the supreme authority remained God and his *Sharî‘ah*, but they thought of their political engagement as a practical step in the context of which it was possible to play a limited role

so as to forward their interests and their efforts to realize them. That did not mean they had abandoned their ultimate goal of founding a Muslim state that applied the *Sharî'ah*. In this frame of reference they considered democracy as one way of organizing the issues that impacted the interests of the general populace; it had nothing to do with the business of sanctioning and forbidding (in a religious sense).

On this basis the mainstream recognized the existence of a variety of political parties with differing agendas under the umbrella of the *Sharî'ah*. These folk participated in the electoral process and even made alliances with parties that did not advocate the application of the *Sharî'ah*. That was a political tactic based upon a new understanding of the political process. It also eased the pressures political regimes and other social forces, targeting them in particular, brought to bear upon them. In this position they could have an effect upon how things developed instead of waiting for the comprehensive revolution (as happened in

Iran) or a military coup (as happened in The Sudan).

Things began to look different in the 1990s. The Islamist liberals who won a popular majority in the elections challenged the Islamic government in Iran, the government of ‘the scholar’s rule’ (*wilayat-ul-faqîh*). In spite of the Turâbî-esque Islamist government, unrest continued in The Sudan. A civil war broke out in Algeria when the Islamists won a majority in the elections. When the Russians withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989 conflict broke out between the Mujâhidîn organizations even though all of them subscribed to the doctrine of Islamic sovereignty. In Egypt, as we have noted, the youth pulled out of the Muslim Brotherhood and tried to set up their own political party under the name, ‘The Party of the Center’ that includes both Muslim and Christian members.

The Islamists now see that the business of politics is not just a pragmatic thing. It has to do with the notion of authority or to whom authority belongs. Does it belong to scripture

and the *Sharî'ah*, or does it belong to the populace and the body politic? The young folk of The Party of the Center speak of 'civil society', of the 'right to differ', and of recognizing the 'other' not just in political terms but also in terms of culture and religion. Shaykh Muhammad Mahdî Shams-ud-Dîn, president of the Supreme Shî'î Council in Lebanon, took the initiative to propose the idea that 'the sovereignty of the nation comes from itself', and gave that thesis an underpinning of religious scholarship both from a Shî'î and a Sunnî perspective. Others have legitimized the demand to separate politics from the *Sharî'ah* (not necessarily religion from state). They have said that this separation was the practice in the days of classical Islam. When the confrontation between Nasr Hâmîd Abû-Zayd and the Islamist radicals came to a head in Egypt, people spoke of the 'right of the individual to define his or her own choice, including the right to apostasy or to abjure Islam'. In this regard they sited the case of Ibn-ur-Râwudî in the 9th century.

There has been an interesting and prolonged debate between the Egyptian professor of philosophy, Hasan Hanafî, and his Moroccan counterpart, Professor Muhammad ‘Âbid al-Jâbrî, on the issue of pluralism and why it has been more or less ignored in Muslim thought. Hasan Hanafî is of the opinion that the notion of the ‘enfranchised group’ that contemporary Islamist groups still espouse goes back essentially to early Islam and specifically to the Ash‘arite school of thought. Al-Jâbrî, for his part, believes that the notion of enfranchisement is relatively new, has to do with the psychologically complex nature of modern Islam even though it may have old roots in some *qur’ânic* passages and Islamic practices. The debate then spun itself out dealing with ancient Islamic texts and the Muslim medieval experience, asking whether that was inimical to intellectual and political pluralism today, or whether the storms of modernization were to account for the impasse.

In the mid-8th century the chief judge of Basrah, ‘Ubayd-Allâh ibn-ul-Hasan al-‘Anbarî, stated, “Every *mujtahid*(4) is right.” We do not know the environment or circumstances that led al-‘Anbarî to decide or argue thus. Clearly the man was trying to remove the causes of controversies then raging by arguing that truth is relative, and thus disagreement and the multiplicity of options is legitimate. But what constitutes a tolerable level of discord; where does one draw the line between what is permitted and what is prohibited so far as controversy is concerned? It appears that al-‘Anbarî permitted disagreement on matters of the foundations of jurisprudence (roots, *usûl*) and their systematic elaboration (branches, *furû‘*); that is to say, on matters of both doctrine (*‘aqîdah*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*).

What seems to indicate this is that nobody objected to there being disagreements on the level of jurisprudence; that is, after all, only a branching from the roots that deals with matters having to do with people’s daily lives.

It is not sacred writ or, if scripture is cited, it is with reference to passages that bear various interpretations. The disagreements or multiplicity of views that raised problems dealt with those issues having to do with the nature of God and his attributes, divine decree and fate (*al-qadâ' wa-l-qadr*), apostasy and faith, the human being's destiny, reward and punishment, and how those would be implemented on the Day of Resurrection. Especially on these issues there sprang up many partisan groups like the *Qadariyyah*, the *Jabriyyah* and the *Mu'tazilah*. At the same time political conflicts gave rise to the *Muhakkimah*(5) and to the *Shî'ah*. These latter also adopted doctrinal positions that distinguished them from others.

There is no doubt that the issue of 'salvation' or of 'true doctrine' gave rise to all those disagreements. But did al-'Anbarî say what he did because he believed truth was relative, as we have judged, or because it is impossible to have certain knowledge of these esoteric and metaphysical matters? We cannot know for

certain what al-‘Anbarî’s intention was. What we do know is that his opponents responded that truth is singular; in other words, among all the many opinions and legal judgments only one can be right. That means that while there may be many opinions and judgments, when the matter comes to implementation only one statement or opinion can be chosen. Whether we agree with this or not, an opinion given in this circumstance cannot be a certainty. More often than not it is a notion, despite its only relative merits, that facilitates getting on with the job. Clearly we can say this only with respect to branch issues, issues that relate to people’s daily lives. We cannot say this with respect to doctrines concerning which there must be certainty, admitting no doubt or hesitation, and allowing for no legal judgment (*ijtihâd*) that may be either false or true.

Al-‘Anbarî, therefore, stood alone in his opinion that truth was relative. Thereafter, as Muhammad Arkûn puts it, all the Muslim factional groupings formed their ‘orthodoxies’. Then controversy really gained momentum

even within each grouping. Eventually Sunnî orthodoxy became the dominant strand during the era of the Turkish sultanates both among the governing elite and eventually among the general public. This is still the case today. Sunnî orthodoxy, of course, is more embracing since it does not have an official doctrinal formula on which there is a consensus among its various sub-groupings, and it allows for an acceptable level of diversity within its ranks. Even on the level of doctrinal ideas there are four recognized schools among the Sunnîs: the Ash‘arî, the Mâturîdî, the Salafî, and the Sûfî schools of thought. Both theologians and jurists colluding, these schools have always adopted isolation and marginalization as a tactic. Even al-Ghazzâlî (the greatest theologian of the Ash‘arî school in the late 12th and early 13th centuries), who composed a treatise urging that the practice of declaring someone apostate (*takfîr*) should be stopped, wrote a stinging attack upon the esotericists (*al-bâtiniyyah*). Ibn-Taymiyyah, the most important Salafî of the 14th century, attacked in great detail all lines of thought that did not

conform to his own including the Ash‘arî and Sûfî schools.

Some historians of Islamic want to attribute the decline in the fortunes of religious pluralism among Sunnîs during the depressed Islamic ‘middle ages’ to the Household of Islam’s being subjected to the Crusader and Mongol invasions. But the ideologies about *jihâd* and about dividing the world into the Household of Islam and the Household of War long preceded the appearance of the Crusaders in the Orient. Furthermore Sunnîs cannot be thought to have spearheaded the policy of expulsion. The Mu‘tazilah, thought to have been Islam’s quintessential folk of reason, were the first to propose the issue along with the Muhakkimah and the Shî‘ah in the 8th century. Only the Murji’ah(6) condemned outright declaring any Muslim an apostate no matter how he might deviate. It is thought that al-‘Anbarî and his contemporary, Muhârib bin-Dithâr, were members of that school of thought.

There are distinctions to be observed between the attitudes of the governing authorities and the attitudes of theologians and legal scholars. Generally speaking the Muslim governing authority was far more accommodating toward People of the Book (*ahl-ul-kitâb*) and the People of the Covenant (*ahl-ud-dhimmah*) than were the legal scholars. The problem was that, from the 9th century onward, the state lost its grip on the legislative process. That passed over to the legal scholars. The actions of the governing authority, be they bad or good, did not have legal weight. They remained innovations — be they bad or good — that hung upon the decision of the legal scholars. The good news is, from the 9th century, that Sunnî legists gave over the task of enforcing the good and forbidding the bad (*al-amr bi-l-ma‘rûf wa-n-nahî ‘an al-munkar*) to the state. A legal scholar might condemn this or that action on the part of a person of the Covenant, or this or that Muslim group or sect, but the political institution was in control of whether or not to punish that person or group. This is why,

during the days of the Mamlukes and of the Ottomans, it was primarily the police who protected the minorities from attacks by the common folk that were provoked by this or that hotheaded legal scholar.

In the 10th century Abû-l-Hasan al-‘Âmirî tried to lay a foundation for dealing with the issue of religious or doctrinal disagreement. This is what he said: “Religion is scripture, tradition and scholarly insight (*ijtihâd*).” He noted that the *Qur’ân* identified six non-Muslim religious communities — the Jews, the Christians, the Sabeans, the people of Bud (Buddhists and Hindus), and the polytheists. We know that Islam did not recognize the right of those who worshiped idols to retain their religion. Muslims did not interact with Buddhists and Hindus on the basis of mutual recognition. But the tradition is more embracing. The Muslim conquerors acknowledged the presence of Zoroastrians, Buddhists and Hindus. With Jews and Christians they interacted in an even more positive fashion that went well beyond

acknowledgement of presence. It included eating the meat they slaughtered and marrying their women and that implied the possibility of living with them.

The historian, Rashîd-ud-Dîn, who worked as a minister in the court of the Mongol Il-Khans after the Mongols had converted to Islam, used the mechanism of scholarly insight (*ijtihâd*) to reinterpret those *qur'ânic* verses that called for *jihâd* and those others that called for peaceful coexistence (*musâlimah*). He argued that the command to fight referred specifically to the Arab polytheists, and they had long since ceased to exist. Therefore, the verses that remain in force are those concerning peace and a policy of live-and-let-live. He argued further that Islam is a religion that issues an invitation (*da'wah*) and there is no compulsion in religion. Ibn-Taymiyyah, however, responded saying that the deeds of the Mongols contradicted their words; they did not speak the truth. This was outright hypocrisy that, by definition, ruled the Mongols and the Tatars out of the Muslim commonwealth. The

position of the 13th century Rashîd-ud-Dîn was echoed by Sayyid Ahmad Khan in the 1860s when, in the wake of the failed rebellion of 1857, he issued a legal opinion that Indian Muslims could not kill the English (the occupiers of the country) for fear of group extermination.

7

It is clear today that when extremist Islamists turn to the early scriptures so as to counteract openness and relativism in matters religious, legal and political, they are only engaged in a symbolic act. Even they know the problem is a new one. The reformers or modernists, for their part, speak of the *intent* of the *Sharî'ah* and the principle of benefit or interests. But these reformers have not been able clearly and openly to deal with the issue of doctrinal absolutism in any manner similar to what happened during the Second Vatican Council. For instance, this makes it impossible to deal with the issue of apostasy (*riddah*). Suggestions in that regard are still confined to legalistic legerdemain. But, as Târiq al-Bushrî

says, for instance, doctrinal absolutism or maximalism does not necessarily mean not accepting the 'other' or not acknowledging him on his own terms. Nonetheless, so far as you are concerned, that 'other' remains an unbeliever (*kâfir*). Can you look upon him with magnanimity, liberality and respect even though he is among those bound for Hell? Still, the political issue is in fact separate from the issues of religion and culture, and the matter of political and party pluralism has come to be accepted by most Muslim tendencies and movements.

Let not those outside or within the Arab world judge that the Islamists do not accept pluralism and the electoral process. Neither those outside nor those within have provided much of a model in that regard. And experience, the experience of transparent and free cooperation is thus far sadly lacking in the Arab world. There is a lot of talk these days about the opportunities for democracy and pluralism, but those talking also say that there must be a 'culture of democracy'. This is often

used as an excuse to rule out Islamists from participation in the electoral process and sometimes even to prevent elections from taking place at all.

Thirty years ago Professor Constantine Zurayq thought he could defend Arab nationalism because failure is not a sin. That is the thought was not a sin. The failure was the result of a lack of national consciousness. If we look at the idea of national consciousness as Zurayq expressed it, it is a far cry from what we have noted as a 'culture of democracy'. But only let there be free elections and constitutional processes, and we are confident that, without hesitation or fear, a culture of democracy and of pluralism will emerge.

The notion of pluralism in old democratic societies is based on two things: First comes citizenship in the single nation state that exercises authority through consensus or, as Rousseau put it, on the basis of a social

contract. Second, it is a society that has many social and political facets that to a greater or lesser degree enjoy solidarity or the absence of strong divisive forces. But fifty years of tyrannical regimes in the Arab world have struck the idea of citizenship in its solar plexus because there is no notion of legitimacy, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, or openness and freedom in the political arena. Therefore, in most Arab states, there has been an atrophy of citizen awareness and of the mutual functions of protection and guaranteeing that should pertain between the public and private sectors.

When the public sector vanishes or becomes impotent nothing remains but the private sector, either what is 'infra-political' (where clan or ethnic instrumentalities guarantee security) or what is 'supra-political' (that is focused in doctrinal matters and the symbols of religion). Thus Arab societies have become more or less 'Lebanonized' not because in them the state is weak as it is in Lebanon, but because the state has usurped the functions of

society in most Arab states. As a result client relationships have been established between the political establishment and one or more segment of society so as gain control over the security apparatus and the economic sector through clans or ethnic groups or factions or sectarian forces.

So the splintering of society that the omniscient systems effected has struck a blow at historical and national (and sometimes even religious) solidarity. It has laid the groundwork for breaking up historical or existing entities at the first hint of pressure from internal struggles that undermine tyrannical control or from invasion by an outside power. That happened and is still happening in Somalia; it happened in Iraq and is still happening. Its unfolding events — what the eyes see and what the ears hear — terrifies the heart. And now we know that The Sudan is vacillating between tyranny and chaos.

The evidence of increasing social disintegration has raised the fears of many nationalists and Islamists. If earlier they feared

the tyrants that repressed them and the general populace, now they fear (or have grown to fear more) the foreign powers. They have also grown to fear religious, ethnic or nationalist minorities that might appeal to the foreigner to demand self-determination or federalism, an eventuality these folk see as only a relatively broader kind of pluralism.

In recent years there is less tendency to mix democracy with pluralism. Islamists have come to understand that democracy means the rule of the majority. Within the Arab world at least, that majority is Muslim. It is no surprise, then, if the Islamists advocate for and practice democracy so long as most Arab voters are on their side. Pluralism, on the other hand, brings in the religious, ethnic or political 'other'. They are anxious about whether politicians, traditional parties or other partisans might not overstep the bounds, even if in the name of democracy, when passing through the conundrum of the ballot box.

Manifestations and real evidence of social breakup even in old countries like Egypt spark

many fears among Islamists concerning pluralism. Among some of them the term still means nothing other than ‘minority rights’ or, as some have been heard to say, their ‘capitulation’ rights. I have heard this latter term used in Algeria, Morocco, Egypt and even in Syria. ‘We have no problem with democracy,’ they say. ‘Our problem is with pluralism, and particularly with *cultural* pluralism.’ For them cultural pluralism implies social disintegration that will lead to the creation of mini-states.

I have said, responding to that, ‘But you see no objection to political pluralism, at least in theory. That means that, when it comes to the ballot boxes, the religious or ethnic ‘other’ will have no real representation.’ They agree that this is the case and poses no practical problem, even though they may have to think seriously about it in the near future. But they are quick to say, ‘We have not caused the problem. The regimes in power caused it.’ And that much is true. But that does not mean we have to always vacillate between three eventualities: the

current tyrannies, the fearsome prospect of chaos, or political authority co-opted in the name of religion.

Oh! but my heart is breaking for Iraq!

References:

*) Ridwân as-Sayyid is a Lebanese intellectual and academic. He is also consultant editor for *al-Tasamoh Journal*.

1) Followers of Egypt's Gamâl 'Abd-un-Nâsir.
[TR]

2) This was a style of reference to Islam's caliphs in the classical period. [TR]

3) To my knowledge, 'nomocracy' (*numuqrâtiyyah*), is Ridwân as-Sayyid's coinage. It is a cognate with the Greek word for 'law' (*nomos*). It is not here to be

confused with the western cliché, ‘the rule of law’. [TR]

4) A *mujtahid* is more or less an ‘officer of the Islamic court’ in the sense that his training and scholarly credentials qualify him to exercise *ijtihâd*, the activity of sorting through a point of law and expressing a judgment in the form of a *fatwah*, a legal decision. Al-‘Anbarî’s terse and controversial remark was to say that one competent *mujtahid*’s decision is as good as that of any other equally qualified. [TR]

5) This group might be more readily recognized under the title ‘Khawârij’, a term used by their opponents to describe. The term, ‘*muhakkimah*’, refers to their rejection of the arbitration (*hukm*) of the two judges appointed to adjudicate the conflict between the Caliph ‘Alî and his foe, Mu‘âwiyyah, and is more descriptive. This group, though proportionately small, still commands respect and is dominant in Oman and Morocco. [TR]

6) The Murji'ah were an early school of theological speculation particularly favored during the Umayyad Caliphate. The name conveys the notion of living in hope (*rajâ'*) that God's mercy would prevail in spite of human frailty or perversity. The Murji'ah did not survive as an organized school of Sunnî 'orthodoxy' once the 'Abbâsid Caliphate assumed leadership of the Muslim commonwealth even though their ideas persist on an informal level. [TR]