SOCIAL JUSTICE IN ISLAM

by

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Translated by

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ISLAMIC BOOK TRUST
Kuala Lumpur

This work is a complete translation of *Al-'Adalah al-ijtima'iyah fi 'l- Islam* by Sayyid Qutb, published by Maktabat Misr, Cairo, n.d.

First published 1953 by the American Council of Learned Societies.
This revised version first published by Islamic Publications International, P.O.Box 705, Oneonta, NY 13820, U.S.A. Telephone: 800-568-9814 Fax: 800-466-8111 Emial:Islampub@Islampub.com

Reprinted by special arrangement with the Islamic Publications International by:
Islamic Book Trust
607 Mutiara Majestic
Jalan Othman
46000 Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.
Email: ibtkl@pd.jaring.my
Website: www.ibtbooks.com

This edition is not for sale in the United States of America, Canada and countries in South America & Europe including United Kingdom.

ISBN 983-9154-16-8

Director of Publications: Moin Shaikh
Cover and Book design: Chris Alaf
Cover layout: Kathy Yang Chen
Book Composition: Archetype Typography, Berkeley, California
Indexer: Jane Merryman

Printed in Malaysia by
Percetakan Zafar Sdn. Bhd.(97878-H)

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data:

Qutb, Sayyid, 1903-1966
[Adalah al-ijtima iyah fi al-Islam, English]
Social Justice in Islam by Sayyid Qutb;
translated from the Arabic by John B.Hardie;
translation revised and introduction by Hamid Algar. - Rev. ed.
p. cm.
Translation of al-Adalah al-ijtima iyah fi al-Islam.
Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Sociology, Islamic 2. Social Justice--
Islamic countries. I. Hardie, John B. II. Algar, Hamid
III. Ttitle
HN40.M6Q683 2000 305.6'2971
QB199-1884

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INTRODUCTION

Sayyid Qutb, who some twenty-eight years after his death is still the most influential ideologue of the Islamic movement in the contemporary Arab world, began life in the obscurity of the village of Musha (or Qaha) near Asyut in Upper Egypt. He was born there in 1906 to a father who was well regarded in the village for piety and learning, despite the hard times on which he had fallen. Sayyid Qutb was the eldest of five children. He was followed by a brother, Muhammad Qutb, also destined to gain fame as an Islamic writer and activist, and three sisters, two of whom, Amina and Hamida, came to attain some prominence in the ranks of the Muslim Brethren. Encouraged by both his parents, Sayyid Qutb swiftly developed a love for learning, and by the age of ten he had completed memorization of the Qur'an at the local primary school. Three years later, the family moved to Helwan, enabling him to enter the preparatory school for the Dar al-'Ulum in Cairo, a prestigious teachers' training college which he joined in 1929. This marked the beginning of his long and fruitful involvement in education and its problems. On graduating in 1933, he was himself appointed to teach at the Dar al-'Ulum, and a few years later entered the service of the Egyptian Ministry of Education.

The year 1933 also saw the beginning of Sayyid Qutb's extraordinarily varied and prolific literary career. His first book was *Muhimmat al-Sha'ir fi 'l-Hayah* (*The Task of the Poet in Life*), and for more than a decade literature remained—together with education—his principal preoccupation. He wrote poetry, autobiographical sketches, works of literary criticism, and novels and short

stories dealing with the problems of love and marriage. After embracing Islam as an all-inclusive ideology, he came to repudiate much of this early work. At the time, however, it served to elevate him to the proximity of leading figures on the Egyptian literary scene, such as 'Abbas Mahmud al-'Aqqad (d. 1964) and Taha Husain (d. 1973), whose Western-tinged outlook on cultural and literary questions he initially shared. For example, there are traces of individualism and existentialism in some of Sayyid Qutb's novels, above all *Ashwak* (*Thorns*).

Like his mentor al-'Aqqad, Sayyid Qutb was an active member of the oppositional Wafd party, and he became a prominent critic of the Egyptian monarchy. This brought him into inevitable conflict with his superiors at the Ministry of Education, and it took the strenuous efforts of Taha Husayn to dissuade him from resigning. Sayyid Qutb sought anew, in 1947, to emancipate himself from government employ by becoming editor-in-chief of two journals, *al-'Alam al-'Arabi* (*The Arab World*) and *al-Fikr al-Jadid* (*New Thought*). He lost his position with the former as a result of editorial disagreements, and the latter, which sought in a hesitant way to present the model of an Islamic society free of corruption, tyranny, and foreign domination, was proscribed after only six issues. While continuing to write for a wide range of literary and political periodicals, Sayyid Qutb was thus compelled to continue working for the Ministry of Education.

In 1948, the ministry sent him on a study mission to the United States, doubtless with the assumption that direct acquaintance with America would incline him more favorably to official policies and induce him to abandon the oppositional activities that were increasingly taking on an Islamic aspect. Sayyid Qutb's impressions of America were, however, largely negative, and may even have been decisive in turning him fully to Islam as a total civilizational alternative. While noting American achievements in production and social organization, Sayyid Qutb laid heavy emphasis on materialism, racism, and sexual permissiveness as dominant features of American life. His sojourn in the United States coincided, moreover, with the first Palestine war, and he noted with dismay the uncritical acceptance of Zionist theses by American public opinion

and the ubiquity of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice. After completing a master's degree in education at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, Sayyid Qutb decided to forego the possibility of staying in America to earn a doctorate and returned to Egypt in 1951.

One of the most widely read of all Sayyid Qutb's books, *al-'Adalat al-Ijtima'iyyah fi 'l-Islam* (*Social Justice in Islam*) had been published during his absence in America, and with its attacks on feudalism and emphasis on social justice as an Islamic imperative, it earned the approbation of leading figures in the Muslim Brethren. His critical response to Taha Husain's *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafah fi Misr* (*The Future of Culture in Egypt*), a work which sought to present Egypt as an essentially Mediterranean society—i.e., as an appendage of Europe—was also highly appreciated in the same circles. For his part, Sayyid Qutb had been increasingly well disposed to the Muslim Brethren ever since he witnessed the ecstatic reception given in America to the news of the assassination, on February 12, 1949, of Hasan al-Banna, founder of the organization. His perception of the Brethren as defenders of Islam was further strengthened after his return to Egypt when a British official, James Heyworth-Dunne, told him that the Brethren represented the only barrier to the establishment of "Western civilization" in the Middle East.

Sayyid Qutb's cooperation with the Muslim Brethren began almost immediately after his return from America, although his formal membership in the organization may not have begun until 1953. This new allegiance marked a turning point in his political and intellectual life. He had quit the Wafd on the death of its founder, Sa'd Zaghlul, and joined the breakaway Sa'dist Party in 1938, which claimed a greater degree of fidelity to the original ideals of the Wafd. He was also involved in the activities of *al-Hizb al-Watani* (*The Patriotic Party*) and *Hizb Misr al-Fatah* (*The Young Egypt Party*). However, none of these groups engaged his energies and devotions as fully as did the Muslim Brethren, which was, after all, far more than a political party, having aimed since its foundation in 1928 at establishing the hegemony of Islam in all areas of Egyptian life. Conversely, Sayyid Qutb's entry into the ranks of the Brethren provided the organization with its first true

ideologue and led ultimately to a radicalization of the whole Islamic movement in Egypt.

In 1951, Sayyid Qutb began writing for periodicals of the Muslim Brethren such as *al-Risala* (*The Message*), *al-Da'wa* (*The Summons*), and *al-Liwa' al-Jadid* (*The New Banner*), and finally realized his ambition of resigning from the Ministry of Education, ignoring the last-minute allurement of an appointment as special adviser to the minister. He then joined the Brethren formally, and in recognition of his talents was made editor-in-chief of *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun,* the official journal of the organization. In January 1954 the journal was banned, and Sayyid Qutb embarked on the long ordeal of imprisonment and persecution that was to end in his martyrdom some twelve years later.

On July 23, 1952, the Egyptian monarchy had been overthrown in a coup d'etat mounted by a group of soldiers who styled themselves the Free Officers; they were formally led by General Muhammad Najib (aka Naguib), but it soon became apparent that Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir (aka Nasser) was the driving force behind the group. Although the coup was widely popular and its authors grandiloquently dubbed it a revolution despite the absence of mass participation, the Free Officers lacked any organized political base of their own. They therefore turned to the Muslim Brethren, with whom some of their number had already been in contact, for the effective mobilization of popular support. The political counsels of the Brethren were divided, and Hasan Hudaybi, who had succeeded al-Banna as leader, was in addition woefully lacking in political acumen; what is certain is that the idea of taking power at this crucial juncture in Egyptian history did not occur to those who determined the policies of the Brethren. There thus ensued a period of collaboration between the Muslim Brethren and the new regime.

Sayyid Qutb was prominent among the members and associates of the Brethren who collaborated with the Free Officers. According to reliable testimony, leaders of the coup including 'Abd al-Nasir, visited Sayyid Qutb in his home a mere four days before the coup, (Khalidi, 1981, pp. 37-39). About one month after the coup, Sayyid Qutb delivered a lecture on "Intellectual and

Spiritual Liberation in Islam" at the Officers' Club in Cairo, and 'Abd al-Nasir was in attendance. More significantly, Sayyid Qutb was appointed cultural advisor to the Revolutionary Council, established by the Free Officers, and was the only civilian to attend its meetings.

Before long, however, differences arose between the Muslim Brethren and the military rulers of Egypt. As a prelude to eliminating the Brethren as an autonomous force capable of challenging him, 'Abd al-Nasir sought first to coopt the organization by offering cabinet posts to some of its leading members. It was thus intimated to Sayyid Qutb that the Ministry of Education was his for the asking. He was also invited to become director of the *Hay'at al-Tahrir* (Liberation Rally), the newly established government party, and to draw up its program and statutes. Qutb refused all such offers, and most of his colleagues in the Brethren also had the good sense to resist full-scale absorption into the emerging structures of the Nasserist state.

At the same time, it became increasingly apparent that the Revolutionary Council intended to perpetuate its rule indefinitely and was in no mind to listen to the exhortations of the Brethren, either to return to civilian rule based on elections or to call a constitutional referendum. Likewise, it paid no heed to the demand of the Brethren that it should ban alcohol as a first step toward the implementation of the *shari'ah*. Gravest of all was the intention of the Revolutionary Council—carried out in July, 1954—to conclude a new treaty with Britain providing for the retention of a British garrison in the Suez Canal zone and the posting of British troops elsewhere in Egypt whenever Britain deemed its interests in the Middle East to be under attack. This early indication that the nationalist credentials of the Free Officers were not as strong as they proclaimed them to be was profoundly shocking to the Brethren, many of whose members had fought and died in the struggle to evict the British from the Suez Canal zone. The criticisms of the treaty made by the Brethren, and their demand that it be subjected to a referendum, fell on deaf ears.

On January 12, 1954, the Revolutionary Council decreed the dissolution of the Muslim Brethren, and Sayyid Qutb entered jail

for the first time. A temporary change in fortune came on March 28 when, thanks to the efforts of Najib, the ban on the Brethren was rescinded and Qutb, together with other leaders of the Brethren, was released. He was now appointed to the Guidance Council of the Brethren, the governing body of the organization, with overall responsibility for its publications.

Soon, however, 'Abd al-Nasir struck back. Having removed Najib from the Revolutionary Council and gained control of the army and police, he reinstated the January decree proscribing the Brethren and moved toward an attempted destruction of the entire organization.

On October 23, 1954, there took place in Alexandria what appeared to be an unsuccessful attempt on the life of 'Abd al-Nasir. There is reason to think that the affair was stage-managed by 'Abd al-Nasir himself. The man said to have fired the shots, Mahmud 'Abd al-Latif, a member of the Brethren, was personally known to 'Abd al-Nasir as an excellent marksman; it is therefore conceivable that 'Abd al-Nasir should have hired him to attempt an "assassination," trusting him deliberately to fire somewhat askew, and then doublecrossed him by executing him to ensure his silence. Significant, too, is the fact that the incident enabled 'Abd al-Nasir to start posing before the Egyptian masses as their embattled hero and thus to inaugurate the adulatory cult surrounding him that continued to infect much of Arab public opinion, even after the disastrous defeat of June 1967. Most compelling of all is the fact that the incident provided 'Abd al-Nasir with a pretext to round up members of the Brethren on a then unprecedented scale. More than one thousand people were swiftly arrested, and show trials got underway with suspicious promptness. On December 4, 1954, seven leading figures, including Hudaybi, were sentenced to death. Hudaybi's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, but the remaining six were hung.

Predictably enough, Sayyid Qutb was rearrested on this occasion. He was ill at the time of his arrest, but this did not in any way dissuade his jailers from torturing him, in accordance with the still-observed norms of Egyptian justice. Because of extreme physical weakness, Sayyid Qutb was not present in the court in July 1955

when he was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment. He was now destined to spend the rest of his life in prison, with the exception of eight short months of relative liberty in 1965.

The ordeal of imprisonment has been a common, almost universal experience for Muslim thinkers and activists in the modern world. For many of them, it has meant not only suffering, but also the opportunity to reflect on past struggles, to review theories and strategies, to deepen and sharpen their insight, to plan and reorganize. It was for this reason that Said Nursi (d. 1960) described prison as the "Josephian School" (*medrese-i yusufiye*), alluding both to his own experience of jail in Kemalist Turkey and the imprisonment of the Prophet Joseph by the Pharaoh.

While in jail, Sayyid Qutb was able to complete a number of his most important writings, including above all the Qur'anic commentary *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (*In the Shade of the Qur'an*) he had begun in 1962. Clearly inspired by the circumstances of daily struggle and confrontation in which he lived, this commentary is radically different from traditional exegeses, with their verse-by-verse attention to philological and historical detail and their extensive citation of previous authorities and variant opinions. Emphasizing guidance to correct action as the pre-eminent function of the Qur'an, Sayyid Qutb's concern is to draw out the practical commands and instructions contained in each group of verses of the Qur'an and, beyond that, to demonstrate the coherent structure interrelating the variegated topics found in each section of the Qur'an, an aim inspired, perhaps, by his earlier literary interests. *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* has been translated in part or in whole into a number of languages, and it is probably true to say that it has been more widely read than any other modern commentary on the Qur'an.

Reflected in several passages of this commentary are the radical theoretical insights which the experience of prison inspired in him. The savagery he and his fellow inmates suffered over the years—including the massacre of twenty-one members of the Brethren at the Liman Tura military jail in June 1957—forced him to conclude that a regime unprecedented in its ruthlessness had come to power in Egypt, and that the primary problem was no longer overt foreign rule or the absence of social justice. It was

rather the total usurpation of power by forces intensely hostile to Islam, with the result that the entire life of society was fixed in the non-Islamic patterns into which it had gradually fallen as a result of decay and neglect. Drawing on the terminology and theories of Abu 'l-A'la Maududi and Abu 'l-Hasan Nadwi (although ultimately of course on the Qur'an itself), Sayyid Qutb decided that Egypt, together with the rest of the contemporary Islamic world, was strictly comparable to pre-Islamic Arabia in its disregard for divine precepts, and that its state could therefore rightly be designated by the same term—*jahiliyyah*. Occurring only four times in the Qur'an, the term *jahiliyyah* assumed central significance for Sayyid Qutb, encapsulating the utter bleakness of the Muslim predicament and serving as an epistemological device for rejecting all allegiances other than Islam.

According to Sayyid Qutb, this new *jahiliyyah* had deep historical roots, and it was moreover fostered and protected by all the coercive apparatus of a modern, authoritarian state; it could not, therefore, be easily remedied in the short term. What was needed was a long-term program of ideological and organizational work, coupled with the training of a dedicated vanguard of believers who would protect the cause in times of extreme danger (if necessary by recourse to force) and preside over the replacement of *jahiliyyah* by the Islamic order once circumstances had matured.

Sayyid Qutb first developed these ideas in dialogue with a small number of his fellow inmates, and then included them in notes that were smuggled out of jail to be read by members of his family and others close to them. Many other members of the Brethren, dissatisfied with the uncertain leadership provided by Hudaybi, became aware of the existence of the letters, and, at their request, Sayyid Qutb consented to have the letters made more widely available. Thus there came into being a group of about 250 people who were all affiliated with the Muslim Brethren but were bound together primarily by their devotion to the ideas of Sayyid Qutb.

In December 1964, Sayyid Qutb was released from jail. It is said that his release was due in part to continuing ill health and in part to the intercession of 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif, the president of Iraq,

who invited him to settle in his country. Given the tragic denouement to this last period of relative freedom in the life of Sayyid Qutb, it is however possible that the Egyptian government set him free in order to create the conditions for his rearrest, trial, and final elimination; although accused of a conspiracy, he was in fact the victim of one.

In 1964, before Sayyid Qutb's release from jail, a slim volume entitled *Ma'alim fi 'l-Tariq* (*Milestones*) had been published and met with instant success; during the first six months of 1965, it went through five further editions. *Ma'alim fi 'l-Tariq* consisted of some of the letters Sayyid Qutb had sent from prison and key sections of *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an,* and represented a concise and forceful summary of the main ideas Sayyid Qutb had developed: the *jahili* nature of existing society, government, and culture, and the long-term program needed for the establishment of an Islamic order. Continuously read and reprinted down to the present, and translated into most Muslim languages, *Ma'alim fi 'l-Tariq* must definitely count among the historic documents of the contemporary Islamic movement.

On August 5, 1965, Sayyid Qutb was rearrested; two weeks later, his sisters Amina and Hamida were also arrested, together with Zaynab al-Ghazali, the leading female member of the Brethren. Sayyid Qutb was accused of subversion and terrorism and the encouragement of sedition. The first charge rested only on the fact that in 1959 he had been entrusted by Hudaybi with responsibility for organizing the Brethren in the jails and prison camps of Egypt. This organization, known as the *Tanzim,* was supposedly linked to the circles studying his prison letters and dedicated to the immediate and violent overthrow of the Egyptian government. No evidence was presented in court to show that Sayyid Qutb or any group linked to him was plotting armed insurrection, and Sayyid Qutb was even able to establish that on two occasions he had dissuaded members of the Brethren from attempting such activity, not least because the needed change, by its very nature, had to be brought about by popular action. In support of the second charge, the encouragement of sedition, the prosecution placed great emphasis on *Ma'alim fi 'l-Tariq,* and it became apparent that this book,

with its proven widespread appeal and long-term revolutionary implications, represented the nub of the Egyptian government's concern. In no way deterred by its inability to find in the text of the book any call for the immediate seizure of power, on May 17, 1966, the court condemned Sayyid Qutb to death, together with six other prominent members of the Brethren, including Hudaybi. Four of the sentences were commuted to life imprisonment, but Sayyid Qutb was hanged in Cairo, on August 29, 1966, together with two of his companions, Muhammad Yusuf 'Awash and 'Abd al-Fattah Isma'il.

The trial had been essentially of a book and the ideas it contained. However, certain political circumstances may also have influenced the fate of Sayyid Qutb. In 1965, the principal super power patron of 'Abd al-Nasir was the Soviet Union, and it may be significant that the execution of Sayyid Qutb took place shortly after 'Abd al-Nasir had returned from a trip to Moscow; the influence of the Brethren in general and Sayyid Qutb in particular had, after all, served to block the spread of Marxism in Egypt. Moreover, facts came to light in 1976 suggesting that the affair was in part the result of rivalry between two centers of power within the Egyptian regime: the *Mukhabarat,* the military intelligence, and the *Mabahith,* the intelligence arm of the Ministry of the Interior. Anxious to prove its vigilance in protecting 'Abd al-Nasir and at the same time to discredit the *Mabahith,* leading officials in the *Mukhabarat* manufactured the story of a Qutbist plot against the regime. This, at least, is what can be deduced from the memoirs of Shams Badran, the number-two figure in the *Mukhabarat,* who also took responsibility, without any shade of embarrassment, for having prisoners tortured in preparation for the trial.

It is axiomatic that ideas are more difficult to eradicate than those who formulate and expound them, particularly when the passage of time demonstrates ever more persuasively the congruence of those ideas with reality; the intellectual legacy of Sayyid Qutb is thus very much alive.

It is true that several leading figures of the Brethren distanced themselves from Sayyid Qutb's identification of Egyptian society (and by extension Arab and Muslim society in general) as *jahili.*

Notwithstanding his own experiences in jail, Hudaybi wrote what was in essence a refutation of *Ma'alim fi 'l-Tariq,* under the title *Du'at la Qudat* (*Summoners, Not Judges*). He insisted that the *jahiliyyah* was exclusively a historical phenomenon, not a recurrent state, and that it was therefore inadmissible to designate contemporary Muslim society as *jahili.* Muhammad Qutb, brother of Sayyid Qutb, came to endorse this implicitly non-judgmental position, despite having himself published in 1964 a book entitled *Jahiliyyat al-Qarn al-'Ishrin* (*The Jahiliyyah of the Twentieth Century*). Other Brethren intellectuals who discovered a congenial environment in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states also foreswore Sayyid Qutb's radicalism.

By contrast, leaders and sympathizers of the Brethren outside Egypt, such as Sa'id Hawwa and Marwan Hadid in Syria, Fathi Yakan in Lebanon, Rashid al-Ghannushi in Tunisia, and Hasan Turabi in Sudan, all assimilated Sayyid Qutb's analysis of the Muslim predicament to one degree or another, and oriented their movements accordingly. Within Egypt itself, the legacy of Sayyid Qutb has helped give rise to a new generation of radical activists no longer affiliated to the Brethren: 'Abd al-Salam Faraj, author of *al-Faridat al-Gha'ibah* (*The Neglected Duty*), a text that supposedly inspired the assassins of Anwar Sadat to act; the group labeled by the Egyptian authorities *al-Takfir wa 'l-Hijrah* (*Identifying Society as Dominated by Unbelief and Migrating from It*); the amorphous but evidently powerful groupings known as *al-Jama'at al-Islamiyyah* (*The Islamic Societies*); and their supposed mentor, Shaykh 'Umar 'Abd al-Rahman, now incarcerated in the United States.

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If the early, literary-oriented writings of Sayyid Qutb are put aside, a handful of important works can be singled out as containing the quintessence of his thought. Three of these have already been mentioned: *al-'Adalat al-Ijtima'iyyah fi 'l-Islam, Fi Zilal al-Qur'an,* and *Ma'alim fi 'l-Tariq.* All these books are fairly well known outside Egypt and the Arab world, having been translated in part or entirety into a variety of languages.

It is perhaps the first of this trio, a revised English translation

of which we now put before the reader, that has attained the greatest fame, both because of its relative brevity and because of the general interest and relevance of its subject matter. *al-'Adalat al-Ijtima'iyyah fi 'l-Islam* has been translated into numerous Islamic languages, including Persian, Turkish, Urdu, and Malay/Indonesian, and it is the earliest as well as most influential of a cluster of works that have been devoted to the same subject. Sayyid Qutb can thus be seen to have articulated for the first time a major and widely felt concern of the Muslim world. *al-'Adalat al-Ijtima'iyyah fi 'l-Islam,* first published in 1949, was followed two years later by *Ishtirakiyyat al-Islam* (*The Socialism of Islam*), a work by Mustafa al-Siba'i, a leading figure in the Syrian branch of the Brethren. The book is similar in content to Sayyid Qutb's work, although the evocation of socialism in its title contravenes Sayyid Qutb's insistence on the uniqueness and autonomy of Islam as a socioeconomic system, defying all comparison with other ideologies or systems. Also in 1951, Hamka, a prominent Indonesian Muslim thinker, published in Jakarta *Keadilan sosial dalam Islam,* the exact Indonesian equivalent of the title Sayyid Qutb had given his book. The influence of Sayyid Qutb is also to be seen in the contents of the work, although Hamka proceeds more systematically and relegates the discussion of historical matters to the last of his book's eleven chapters instead of interspersing them with his main argument. In Iran, the late forties and early fifties saw the activity of Ayatullah Abu 'l-Qasim Kashani, the most politically engaged *'alim* of the period; like his counterparts elsewhere in the Muslim world, he, too, frequently evoked the theme of social justice in the numerous declarations he delivered. Temporarily allied with Kashani was the organization known as the *Fida'iyan-i Islam,* members of which had both personal and ideological links to the Brethren. It is not therefore surprising that radical measures of socio-economic reform designed to produce social justice occupy an important place in the manifesto published by the *Fida'iyan* in 1950 (Algar, 1986, pp. 23-25). The most substantial treatment of the subject of social justice in Islam appeared a decade later with the first publication of Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's *Iqtisaduna* (*Our Economics*). The only one among the authors mentioned to have had a formal

and rigorous training in the religious sciences, al-Sadr is the most precise in his philosophical argumentation and the best able to correlate general precepts of social justice with the detailed provisions of Islamic jurisprudence. Nonetheless, there is no mistaking his debt to Sayyid Qutb for the term *al-takaful al-ijtima'i* (*social solidarity*) of which he makes frequent use, originated in the work of his Egyptian predecessor.

From one point of view, *Social Justice in Islam* is therefore to be evaluated as a document of the first postwar decades in which Islamic movements and personalities were striving to demonstrate the imperative relevance of Islam to concrete socioeconomic problems. This task gained particular urgency from the relative appeal and vitality of Marxism in a number of Muslim countries at the time, not least in Egypt. This helps to explain the frequency of references to Communism and the Soviet Union. Sayyid Qutb's refutation of Marxism often goes together with a critical evaluation of Christianity, presented as essentially an asceticism with no positive implications for worldly life and historically unable to modify Europe's determining legacy of pagan materialism inherited from Rome. In this comparative context, Islam becomes the ideal mean, avoiding both the unrelieved materialism of Marxism and the otherworldliness of Christianity, and balancing the needs of the individual against those of society. Such a comparison was no doubt inevitable, given the (legitimately) polemical and exhortatory nature of Sayyid Qutb's work; it nonetheless contradicts his own warning against describing Islam in terms other than itself, whether by way of similarity or dissimilarity.

Polemical works tend to give short shrift to history, and several of Sayyid Qutb's attempts at explaining historical trends are distressing in their simplicity. The entry of women into the workforce in European countries is attributed to a sudden and unexplained reluctance on the part of European men to continue providing for their womenfolk; no mention is made of the dislocations brought about by the Industrial Revolution. European history is, of course, incidental to Sayyid Qutb's principal theme, and his treatment of early Islam is of much greater significance.

Briefly put, it is his contention that what he terms "the spirit

of Islam"—frugal, egalitarian, and pious—ceased to permeate the sociopolitical life of the Muslims with the usurpation of the caliphate by the Umayyad dynasty. He attributes the origins of this disaster to the rule of 'Uthman, the third caliph, whom he subjects to a far more rigorous criticism than any Sunni writer preceding him. Not without justice, he condemns 'Uthman for nepotism and misuse of the public funds, permitting the Umayyads to accumulate the wealth and power they would later use to rebel against Hz. 'Ali and pervert the caliphate into a hereditary monarchy. He is nonetheless reluctant to accuse 'Uthman of total dereliction of duty, and suggests instead that by the time he succeeded to the caliphate he was old and weak, unable to resist the pressure exerted on him by his Umayyad kinsmen. He accordingly expresses the wish that either 'Uthman had become caliph earlier in life, or that 'Ali had been third caliph instead; then the plans of the Umayyads would have been thwarted. That neither of these desirable choices prevailed Sayyid Qutb attributes simply to "bad luck." A more satisfactory explanation would of course have involved a critical examination of all the events that took place after the death of the Prophet. Sayyid Qutb's treatment of the caliphate of 'Uthman nonetheless represents a bold questioning of the idealized image of the whole period of the Four Caliphs that is so commonly encountered.

Some references to events taking place as the book was being written and others to developments Sayyid Qutb anticipated are bound also to evoke a critical response from the present-day reader. The emergence of Pakistan and Indonesia as independent states is twice mentioned by Sayyid Qutb as a sign of the universal resurgence of Islam, an estimate which is difficult to sustain in view of the current disarray in both countries. The forecast of the capitalist West being swallowed up by Communism has also, of course, proved to be the exact opposite of the truth. Sayyid Qutb's failed prophecy may be attributed to a general tendency to overrate ideological factors. He correctly regarded the worldviews of the two competing blocs to be essentially the same in their materialistic bases, but then made the assumption that Marxism, as a purer and

more thoroughgoing form of materialism, was bound to win out over its less rigorous counterpart.

Many other insights of Sayyid Qutb have, however, stood the test of time. His assertion that a virulent crusading spirit remains at the core of Western culture, despite a relative decline in active adherence to Christianity, has been tragically vindicated by the genocidal assaults on the Muslims of Bosnia, that were spearheaded by Croats and Serbs but enjoy the complicity of the entire Western world. Similarly, the support instinctively rendered by this crusading spirit to Zionism continues unabated. More importantly, Sayyid Qutb's insistence on the comprehensiveness of Islam as worldview, civilization, and socioeconomic order; his summons to cultural and educational reform; and the moral urgency underlying the whole of his book retain all their validity today, some fifty years after its first publication. For despite all the ink that has been spilled by Muslims and others concerning the "Islamic resurgence," it can hardly be claimed that the Muslim world as a whole is substantially better situated than it was in 1949.

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In the course of reading John B. Hardie's translation of *Social Justice in Islam*, first published in 1953 by the American Council of Learned Societies, as a preliminary to writing this introduction, I encountered a number of passages that seemed not to ring true. On comparing them with the Arabic text, I found that Hardie had indeed misunderstood the original. So egregious were the translator's errors that a checking of the entire translation seemed in order, and as a result numerous other mistakes were discovered. Hardie often confused approximately similar words with each other, failed to understand the Arabic syntax, and sometimes resorted to obvious guesswork when confronted with a particularly problematic sentence or phrase. It is remarkable that the serious errors vitiating his translation have gone almost entirely unnoticed, the only exception being a discreet comment by William Shepherd in a valuable article on "Social Justice in Islam" (Shepherd, 1992, p.199, n. 9). This is presumably because the translation was said to have been made with the cooperation of Sayyid Qutb himself. If that

was indeed the case, either Sayyid Qutb's knowledge of English was unequal to the task of checking the translation, or he trusted Hardie's knowledge of Arabic sufficiently to content himself with a casual review.

It must be admitted, moreover, that Hardie's version reads deceptively well and that occasionally his renderings of difficult passages are both accurate and felicitous.

I have revised the entire translation to correct all gross errors of meaning. A more thoroughgoing revision to make the wording and structure more closely reflective of the original would, of course, have been possible. The changes I have made suffice, however, to make Hardie's translation faithful to the ideas and arguments of the author, a fair if not perfect reflection of the Arabic original.

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The task of revision was complicated by the fact that *al-'Adalat al-Ijtima'iyyah fi 'l-Islam* has gone through several editions that are by no means identical with each other. This, too, is a matter which has largely escaped attention, exception being made again of William Shepherd (Shepherd, 1992, passim). The book has been published at least seven times, but it is not certain that each publication represented a different edition, for the word *tab'a* may mean either "edition" or simply "printing." I have had access only to the fifth edition/printing, published at Cairo in 1377/1958, and it certainly differs significantly from the first edition used by Hardie (even making allowance for his errors of translation). Whole passages found in Hardie are absent from the 1377/1958 printing, to which matters have been added not found in the first edition. Whether the changes were made for the fifth edition/printing or at an earlier date I am unable to tell. Among matters found in the first edition and not in the 1377/1958 printing are the lengthy discussions of *al-masalih al mursala* and *sadd al-dhara'i'* and the restraint shown by Arab forces in the face of Zionist atrocities during the First Palestine War. Conversely, detailed recommendations on the teaching of Islamic history and on the function of literature in education are

missing from the first edition. The *hadith* used for the illustration of various points are not identical in the two editions.

On the basis of a comparison between the first and seventh editions, William Shepherd has suggested that the changes reflect a movement on the part of Sayyid Qutb towards what he calls "radical Islamism," a move caused partly by the ideological influence of Maulana Maudoodi and partly by the unfolding of events in Egypt. This analysis may hold true for the distance Sayyid Qutb travelled between the first and the seventh editions, but cannot be substantiated with reference to the fifth edition, which I have been constrained to use for revising Hardie's translation. As for the differences that do exist between the first and the fifth editions, I have refrained from adding the material found only in the latter and deleting material found only in the former, believing that the first edition has its own particular logic and documentary value.

–Hamid Algar
Ramadan 1420/January 2000