

الفكر الإسلامي المعاصر بين التقليد والتجديد

وثيقة الأزهر عن مستقبل مصر (٢١ يونيو ٢٠١١) مثلاً

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كما هو معروف ان المؤسسات وخاصة الدينية منها تميل إلى أن تكون تقليدية ومحافظه، كونها تعترف برسالة قديمة تعود لقرون أو آلاف السنين، وهم مكلفون بحماية هذه الرسالة ونشرها على الرغم من تأثرهم بتيارات تفسيرية مختلفة، لذلك هذه المؤسسات تعرضت لمواقف عقائدية ومبادئ ليست عرضة لتحولات جوهرية لذا كان عليهم دائماً التعامل مع العادات واللغات والثقافات المختلفة، لذلك واجهت هذه المؤسسات في العصر الحديث اضطرابات عميقة أدت في بعض الحالات إلى تغييرات جذرية على الأقل في لغة واسلوب تصريحاتهم وراءهم.

CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC THINKING BETWEEN TRADITION AND RENEWAL, AN
EXAMPLE TEXT:

al-Azhar's document 'On the future of Egypt' (21 June 2011)

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Abstract

As is well known institutions - especially religious ones - tend to be traditionalist and conservative. Confessors of an ancient message of centuries or millennia, charged with guarding and disseminating it, albeit affected by their origins by different interpretative currents, they have progressively attested to doctrinal and precepts positions that are not very prone to substantial transformations. On the one hand this is part of their very nature and the function that is expected of them, but it is no less true that in every age and at different latitudes they have always had to deal with customs, languages and cultures of various kinds. and that in the modern era they have all been challenged by profound upheavals which in some cases have led to radical changes at least in language and style in their pronouncements, when they have not come to affect even ritual and liturgical forms with not few adverse reactions and results sometimes problematic.

1. Introduction

Under the radar the idea often prevails that with the passage of time things evolve from a more primitive state to a more advanced one, but even a generic knowledge of history provides many denials to this typically modern illusion. There have always been more dynamic and creative periods followed by phases of stasis if not of real involution. Precisely the various and worrying crises that have affected even very developed countries and systems in recent decades should lead us to be more cautious than the mythical and even paradoxical vision of progressive, continuous and infinite growth... Furthermore, as has often been noted, even turning points and major changes do not occur suddenly, but are almost always the result, perhaps rapid, but of slow and hidden dynamics already underway for some time.

2. The Islamic 'case': from an early 'Renaissance' to decline

One of the most widespread and even related to us among the monotheistic religious traditions, the Muslim one, is a classic example of what has just been mentioned. Confident in herself, without the weight of previous elaborations that bound her, in her first and extraordinarily expansive period it knew what we could compare to our Renaissance (also thanks to an unprecedented exchange with the surrounding civilizations), while after the devastating invasion of the Mongols in the thirteenth century experienced a long period of decline and stagnation, just when in the West, after the barbaric phase and already in the Middle Ages, Humanism was laying the foundations for profound changes and radical innovations.

It was mainly under the Abbasid dynasty, which took power in 750 CE and placed its capital in Baghdad, which began a great process of acquiring and elaborating the classical inheritance in the courts of the new conquerors.

While the Umayyad dynasty of Damascus, which followed the original epoch of the first four caliphs, had retained an eminently Arabocentric character, with the Abbasids the universalist claims of the Islamic empire and the Muslim religion took over. To consolidate their image and their historical function, they did not hesitate to conceive and present themselves as the heirs of the great empires

that had preceded them. In particular of the Persian one, which Islamic expansion had overwhelmed and replaced very quickly, something that had not happened instead for the Byzantine one which was conquered much later by the Ottomans.

Translations were stimulated and favored in a similar context, focusing first on the Persian astrological and historical texts that would form the basis of the legitimizing mythology of the new state, but soon spreading to other languages and further sectors of knowledge. The need to provide Muslim scholars with the same tools available to their Jewish, Christian or Zoroastrian adversaries – strongly Hellenized – opened the doors to the study of Greek thought, whose founding texts sometimes survived only in Syriac versions or in other languages of which they often held ethnic or religious minorities now included in the great expanding Arab–Muslim sea.

Once internal power was consolidated, the Abbasids turned less to the Iranian heritage and more to the Greek one, for various reasons. On the one hand it was highly rational in nature and therefore allowed the Caliph to intervene directly in religious questions (theological and juridical) without a class of experts virtually outside of his control being able to claim a monopoly, on the other hand he was also useful from the propaganda point of view in a pro–Hellenic and anti–Byzantine key. In fact, putting the Christians of Byzantium in a bad light as unworthy heirs of the superior Greek knowledge that he instead appreciated, the Caliph posed himself as a champion of the Islamic faith (presented as a simpler and more rational creed compared to the dogmatic quarrels of others), worthy successor of the greatest spirits of antiquity and justified the centrality of his power and the legitimacy of his enterprises.

At that time, the boundaries between astronomy and astrology were not yet clear, so it was that some scholars at the Abbasid court already dedicated themselves between the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the ninth to the preparation of horoscopes and the improvement of the first astrolabes. The computational bases for these applications were ensured by specialists that we still remember today, such as the famous al–Khwarizmi (d. 845 CE), from whose name the term “algorithm” derives. As regards these matters, it should be remembered that their development was also determined by the need, linked to the Islamic cult, to set precisely both the times of the five daily prayers, and the

beginning and end of the lunar month of Ramadan, and the exact direction of Mecca towards which the prayers must orient in order for the rite to be valid.

Medical studies were particularly taken care of, both by translating the works of Galen and the *Materia medica* by Dioscorides into Arabic, and by enhancing the oriental, Iranian and Indian tradition. Naturally, alongside real sciences, treatises of a different nature also became widespread, such as those on the interpretation of dreams, as well as scholarly works that contained anecdotes, proverbs and all kinds of curiosities.

If we keep in mind that all this took place while in Europe it was still difficult to get out of the barbaric era, we can better appreciate how readily and flexible many Muslim scholars of the first centuries of Islam were able to achieve a powerful synthesis, without any hesitation or closure, nor inferiority complexes.

The fact remains that their political–military expansion into territories of the Middle East (especially in the Holy Land, due to its obvious symbolic values) and North Africa – Christians for over half a millennium – constituted a trauma for the latter and for Europe, which was stunned and helpless as a huge antagonist empire was formed at its doors, and even within its borders. However, it should be remembered that for a long time the majority of the conquered populations continued to maintain their traditional creed and indeed in some cases they welcomed the new masters who did not interfere in the theological disputes that opposed the various churches, as was the custom of the Christians Emperors of the East. Furthermore, the egalitarian nature of the Bedouins and their lack of aptitude for cultivation led to changes that at times facilitated the serfs, whose condition under the Persian satraps and in the Byzantine fiefdoms was certainly not idyllic. Those who embraced the religion of the newcomers were advantaged both from the concrete point of view and as regards the career, even if for a long time the leadership roles were left to the local notables – Jews, Christians or Zoroastrians who were – as the Arabs did not they had the necessary skills to immediately take direct control of the administration of such a vast empire in which large and rich areas relied on agriculture, which they scarcely knew. Doctors, scholars and even non–Muslim ministers were often among the closest collaborators of the Caliphs and Islamic governors of important provinces. Where Christianity was deeply rooted in local cultures and languages, albeit gradually eroded by conversions and in any case deprived of the supremacy it had

previously enjoyed, it remained alive for centuries, up to now retaining highly respected positions as in Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Iraq. In the Maghreb, however, a very rapid eclipse was recorded, up to its total disappearance, probably due to its still poor acculturation among the Berber populations, when the wave of Muslim militias overwhelmed these lands. To bend the fierce resistance of these peoples, the Islamic conquerors involved them in further expansionist enterprises, towards the Iberian Peninsula, in which Muslim domination was established for centuries, until the Reconquista which was right only at the end of the fifteenth century.

As had happened at the opposite end of the empire, in Baghdad and its surroundings, an admirable contamination of cultures was also produced in Andalusia. In the first century, after the conquest – of course – political and military issues prevailed, but studies soon flourished and exchanges multiplied. If in the East things were complicated by the presence of various churches, often in friction if not openly hostile towards Rome, Spain represented a closer terminal, therefore easy to access, and characterized by the sharing of the Latin culture that was still dominant in Western Europe, while at the opposite end it was rather Greek that prevailed as the language of knowledge.

In the parts of the Iberian Peninsula dominated by Islam, however, alongside the survival of Latin and local languages, Arabic also had an extraordinary diffusion among the indigenous population, as the following complaints by Paolo Álvaro (855) testify: "I Christians love to read the poems and love stories of Arabs; Arab theologians and philosophers study, not to refute them but to learn correct and elegant Arabic. Which layman today reads the Latin commentaries on the Holy Scriptures or studies the Gospels, the prophets or the apostles? Alas! All talented young Christians read and study Arabic texts enthusiastically; they put together huge, very expensive libraries; they despise Christian literature, deeming it unworthy of attention. They have forgotten their language. For every person capable of writing a letter in Latin to a friend, there are a thousand who know how to express themselves in Arabic with elegance and write poetry in this language better than the Arabs themselves".¹

Evidently not everyone accepted the domination of another people willingly, moreover a follower of a different religion, so much so that some Christians voluntarily exposed themselves to martyrdom publicly offending Mohammed and

his faith, as well as – after the Reconquista – Muslim exiles. they would regret the homeland from which they were driven out. Without therefore wanting to belittle the tragedies and grief that struck both communities, we cannot, however, deny that in the Spain of those centuries there was a fruitful exchange between civilizations from which Europe above all benefited.

Even the future Pope Sylvester II (d. 1003), when he was still only the monk Gerberto d'Aurillac, at the end of the 10th century studied mathematics in Barcelona (then under Christian control, but linked to the Islamic culture centers of Cordoba and Seville) and continued to be interested in calculus and astronomy – based on Arab sources – after being elected pope. He even wrote a book on the astrolabe which turned out to be an extraordinary precedent, the progenitor of a literary–scientific fashion destined to last: many after him, in fact, to demonstrate that they had a scientific background, composed works on the same subject and, a century later, Eloisa even gave the name of Astrolabe to the son he had had from Abelard. The latter, who became one of the most esteemed but also most contested thinkers of his time, composed among other things the famous Dialogue between a Jew, a Christian and a philosopher, in which the last character clearly has the likeness of a Muslim, in the role of the defender of rationality.

Moreover, Adelard of Bath (d. 1160), would have written: "From the Arabian masters I learned one thing, to let myself be guided by reason, while you are dazzled by the aspect of authority and you are guided by other reins (which are not those of reason). In fact, what actually is authority if not a bridle? And as brute animals are led everywhere by the bridle and have no idea what drives them or why, but follow the rope that pulls them, so the authority of the scriptores leads not a few of you into danger, bound and bound by an animalistic credulity".²

It should not be forgotten that numerous Jewish scholars also participated in these intense and fruitful exchanges, despite the discrimination that they often had to suffer due to their religious identity over the centuries. Regarding the latter, it should be remembered that the phenomenon of anti–Semitism was much more present in Christian Europe than in the Islamic territories of the Mediterranean. From a certain point of view this might seem paradoxical. In fact, if we read the sources of the two monotheistic faiths that arose in the wake of

Judaism, it is inevitable to find a much more pronounced anti-Jewish attitude in the Koran than in the New Testament due to the friction between the Prophet and the Jewish communities of Medina (622-632). Yet, phenomena of persecution and massacres of entire Jewish communities were much more frequent on our continent than in Muslim countries, where indeed the Jews expelled from Europe often found refuge and good hospitality. All this confirms to us that, well beyond what is written in the sacred texts, it is the concrete circumstances of history that determine the attitudes of populations in their mutual relations. After the birth of the state of Israel, in fact, previously unknown anti-Semitic attitudes spread in the Arab world, when coexistence had long been not only peaceful but also fruitful.

Also in material culture, and especially in various types of art or handicrafts, a contact between Europe and the Arab-Muslim countries is documented since the eighth century, when some Popes of Syrian-Palestinian origin favored the influx of labor Christian and Islamic, fleeing the iconoclastic East or in difficulty due to the restrictions imposed on the visual arts even by some Muslim rulers. In the Lombard Temple of Cividale del Friuli, both the stucco decorations and the techniques used clearly demonstrate the presence of these. If on the one hand we faced armed, on the other there was no lack of diplomatic missions, such as the one that brought the gifts of the Caliph of Baghdad Hârûn al-Rashîd to Charlemagne in 801, including a complicated water clock and an elephant that awakened the most vivid wonder at the court of Aachen. In 906 it was Princess Bertha of Tuscany, daughter of Lothair, who sent letters and sumptuous gifts to Baghdad. The bells looted by Christian churches sometimes ended up in the mosques of North Africa, reused as lamp holders, while in Europe they did not disdain to include among the objects used also in religious celebrations precious decorated fabrics, rock crystal jugs, ivory caskets, basins and candlesticks in brass procured – in a peaceful way or not, especially in the period of the Crusades – in the countries of the East. The fact that the Arabic script closely resembles decorative motifs and its very little knowledge by Westerners has favored the diffusion in various European cathedrals of reliquaries or silk cloths on which even typical eulogies taken from the Koran or in any case of clear Islamic origin appear. Even on the bandolier by Davide del Verrocchio and, according to some, in the halo of the Virgin by Gentile da Fabriano, Arabic

writings linked to the Muslim faith are recognizable. The Palatine Chapel of Palermo depicts in the images of the alveoli – performed by Islamic workers – the typical entertainment of the oriental rulers of the time: dancers, chess players, lute players and convivial meetings ...

3. The parties are reversed

In the early Middle Ages and up to the humanistic era, things therefore went this way, but a profound change took place in the following centuries. The rediscovery of the Greek and Latin classics (which, as we have seen, also took place thanks to Arab intermediation) laid the foundations for the flourishing of the Renaissance, while geographical explorations and scientific discoveries imprinted an extraordinary acceleration of the development of Europe, within it and also relative to its location with respect to other continents.

It was above all the new routes and the discovery of America that reduced the centrality of the Mediterranean and contributed to the rise of new powers, almost totally absorbed by the new perspectives that were opening up (as well as by their mutual rivalries). The Islamic world remained a commercial partner (think of Venice and its relations with the Turks) and a formidable adversary, with the Ottomans who came to threaten Vienna itself on several occasions, but gradually the question of the East became a secondary and almost a marginal nuisance for Europeans who were amassing enormous fortunes and going further and further in technical and scientific progress.

However, it was not a matter of mere material development: in the European evolution that began in the 1500s there were the seeds of modernity. An incredible series of events accelerated transformations to the utmost at every level. Experimental science began to question everything that had been transmitted on the authority of the ancients, proposing a radical revision of all knowledge. The very conception of the universe was overturned, with the gradual and not easy success of new theories, such as heliocentrism that overturned the classic vision of a universe centered on the earth. The movements of the latter, as well as those of the other stars, were defined with increasing precision, contributing enormously to the development of orientation techniques, especially in navigation. Something diametrically opposite from the ideal point of view corresponded to the Copernican revolution: no longer God, but man was considered the center of creation and confidence in the latter's faculties to

understand and transform creation exploded. The philosophy of being gradually imposed itself on the philosophy of becoming and even the arts underwent a profound transformation. The Protestant Reformation hit hard the principle of authority and with its translation of the Bible into the common language, which spread rapidly thanks to the newly invented printing, contributed to the literacy of the popular classes. Even on the political level, the affirmation of nation states progressively replaced the great traditional empires and the middle classes played an ever-increasing role in social dynamics and equilibrium. As is well known, it has been hypothesized that the Protestant ethic was also at the basis of the birth of capitalism, and even if this theory subsequently underwent a downsizing, it is undeniable that all these phenomena, while affecting different sectors of life, acted concurrently to stimulate great upheavals, not only in the intellectual field, but also in the concrete life of the European populations.

In the same period, the Islamic world instead underwent a transformation in many ways reverse. After the first centuries of extraordinary flowering, internal divisions on the one hand and the fatal blow of the Mongol invasion which in 1258 had destroyed Baghdad and exterminated the ruling family, determined the definitive demise of a Muslim empire at least formally unitary. The Turkish praetorians, who had already placed the caliphate under protection, no longer found any resistance that prevented them from affirming themselves with their own dynasties. These undoubtedly had the merit of containing the further advance of the nomadic hordes that threatened the Mediterranean area: it was the Mamluks who definitively stopped the Mongols in the battle of 'Ayn Jalût (1260). Furthermore, they inherited the mission of their predecessors who had ruled much of the Muslim world from Damascus and Baghdad, but the universalism of previous centuries no longer resurfaced as it had been. Persia and the even more eastern Islamic regions began to have an evolution of their own, detached from the rest of the territories dominated by the same faith. It was rather towards Anatolia, the Balkans and central Europe that the efforts of the Ottoman sultans were concentrated, just as Turkish piracy affected the coasts of the Mediterranean for a long time. East and West were gradually turning their backs, even within the Muslim group, with Asia much more influenced by Iranian and therefore Shiite elements (especially after the 1600s) and the Middle Eastern and North African area under Turkish protection. The impoverishment of the

metropolises and the crisis of the land trade routes (the famous Silk Road) weakened the middle classes, widening the gap that separated the small privileged castes from the great mass of the poor. The teachings became more repetitive, less original and daring, just as it became more difficult for scholars and artists to find someone who would enhance their ingenuity. It is true that even in the darkest periods, as under Tamerlane himself, the artisans were spared from the massacres and sent to embellish the fairytale capital: Samarkand, as well as extraordinary works of art that date back to this a period perhaps too hastily defined of 'only' forfeiture. But the road to decline had clearly been taken. If post-barbarian Rome or the Paris of the Franks would not have held up to comparison with Baghdad or Cordoba, already equipped with public lighting, libraries and hospitals when Europe timidly raised its head in the early Middle Ages, now the balance of power and quality of life had comparatively reversed.

The way in which each of the two opposite faces also changed – consequently –. Many Muslims realized the need to make profound changes in order to be able to stand up to modern Europe. On the western side, however, people began to look indiscriminately towards the East with a spirit of sufficiency, or at the most of curiosity. An 'exotic' trend that in part continues to this day.

4. Same challenges, different contexts

Compared to the internal struggle between the different components of the community that has long marked the history of Islam, today the urgency of a common front towards an external enemy seems to prevail, in a conflict which, however, often ends up taking on the characteristics of a sort of civil war between Muslims who express different positions with respect to the Western model. The presence of this third wheel complicates things considerably. In fact, it does not represent just one more factor, but shifts the axis of the problem, modifying the approach to the latter. It is in fact the attitude that dissident institutions and groups take towards the West and towards what it represents that determines their location, and even their definition is part of a conceptual framework and terminology of Western origin. There are Muslim authors who have no reserve in using neologisms of European influence and in their own language neologisms strongly influenced by that are now attested: one therefore ends up seeing oneself and conceiving oneself through the lens of other people's

perception. Islamic radicalism is, in this, a child of its time and shares the same fate as Muslim modernism, despite being its antagonist. As the reformist tended to define himself essentially by similarity to the Western model, the radical does so by contrast, but the state of dependence on the model itself remains: "the practical Westernism of the Arabs means not so much an aseptic study of European culture, as their valorisation and appropriation of some of its aspects. While the Orientalist usually wants to describe, rarely understand and almost never acquire, the Arab Westernist seeks above all models".³

The impasse caused by this situation has been highlighted several times by some of the most acute Muslim intellectuals: "The situation is therefore clear: our masses inherit a ready-made nourishment, called religion or tradition. to choose: it is only a matter of acknowledging it. The same happens for our intellectuals: no effort of discernment. There is a predefined technique, there are consumer products already packaged that arrive to them from the West and they have to do nothing but open The same doctrines, although various and sometimes opposite, are imported ready-made and well-packaged, conforming to standard norms, ready for use for those who have studied. In other words they, without taking any trouble or spoiling the blood looking and comparing, they end up becoming followers of this or that system of thought".⁴ It would therefore only be a question of "take it or leave it", without the possibility of maturing one's own original position, almost cornered by such an intrusive model: "While the modernist was dependent on the West by being attracted to it, the neo-revivalist he is always dominated by a feeling towards the West, which is however one of repulsion. The most important and urgent thing for him to do is therefore to get rid of it mentally, acquiring an attitude that allows him to remain independent of it, while understanding both Western civilization and any other, but particularly the former, as it is at the root of many of the social transformations that are happening around the world. As long as Muslims remain dependent on the West in one way or another, they will not be able to move in shape independent and autonomous".⁵

There is enough for the pervasive presence of the Western model to be perceived as a dark threat, almost as a pathology.

For a long time, since my graduation thesis, I have dealt with the intense debate taking place in the Islamic world about the relationship between tradition and renewal, within which the issue of relations between different cultures takes on particular importance. It is in fact undeniable that the closest contact with Western civilization and the influences deriving from it have triggered a process of transformation in Muslim countries at every level for at least a couple of centuries now. However, it is clear at the same time that such a confrontation, however stimulating, cannot avoid also producing imbalances, sometimes dramatic due to their ideological violence, which raise the crucial question of a correct balance between innovative thrusts on the one hand and need to maintain a strong link with one's own cultural roots on the other.

The various proposals that have been advanced so far to address this situation have not proved capable of resolving it and indeed we have witnessed a polarization between two opposing positions, both of which have proved inadequate and in many respects counterproductive. On the one hand, there are those who decisively opt for modernization, making their own the secular and secularized approach inherent in modernity and more or less explicitly supporting the need to emancipate themselves from the forms and the very concepts of classical Muslim heritage. The limit of this choice is to envisage a loss of identity and the alignment with an external model, which is moreover perceived as hostile due to various and heavy political implications. At the opposite extreme there are those who instead reaffirm the perennial validity of the Islamic system and attribute the current state of decadence and backwardness of Muslim countries not to an alleged inadequacy of this system which would need to be reformed, but to its lack of systematic application and consistent. The risk inherent in this second option is to imagine an impossible return to the past, a past that is moreover mythical, which is not recalled for what it really was, but ideologically reconstructed according to the present situation. The unsuccessful outcome of other attempts and a widespread need for reassurance have led this latter orientation to gradually gain ground in the Muslim world over the last few decades and more recently the worrying drift of extremist fringes, when not openly terrorist.

Most Islamic intellectuals participate in the ongoing debate by arguing in favor of this or that option, while it is more difficult to come across thinkers who know

how to approach the subject from a point of view that does not reduce the question to simple acceptance or rejection. of modernity, proposing mediation hypotheses capable of responding at the same time to two apparently contradictory but in reality complementary needs: on the one hand that of evolving, positively assuming the challenge of modernity without limiting itself to undergoing it in a passive and subordinate way, on the other hand that of remaining faithful to one's own specificity understood, however, not as a defensive retreat on oneself, but as a heritage that not only needs to be preserved, but also critically revisited, enriched and valued. Most Islamic intellectuals participate in the ongoing debate by arguing in favor of this or that option, while it is more difficult to come across thinkers who know how to approach the subject from a point of view that does not reduce the question to simple acceptance or rejection. of modernity, proposing mediation hypotheses capable of responding at the same time to two apparently contradictory but in reality complementary needs: on the one hand that of evolving, positively assuming the challenge of modernity without limiting itself to undergoing it in a passive and subordinate way, on the other hand that of remaining faithful to one's own specificity understood, however, not as a defensive retreat on oneself, but as a heritage that not only needs to be preserved, but also critically revisited, enriched and valued.

I must admit that, in recent times, my interest in this perennial diatribe has diminished a little also due to its repetitiveness which, as well as in other forms of pure Western and non-religiously inspired ideologies, has essentially become blocked on themes and theses. which date back to about fifty years ago and rarely do you come across new proposals worthy of attention.

I come back here to deal with it, however, since in the period of the so-called Arab Springs, a highly prestigious institution issued documents that I believe are worthy of interest.

5. Context and texts

Starting from 25.1.2011, impressive demonstrations also began in Egypt which led to the 11th of the month following the resignation of President Mubarak, who had been in office for thirty years. The spark that had arisen shortly before in Tunisia was infecting many neighboring countries, struggling for some time with authoritarian and corrupt regimes, apparently immovable. The only form of

opposition, in the absence of liberal or socialist alternatives eliminated with the reckless support of the Western powers, was represented almost exclusively by radical Islamist movements, to the satisfaction of the local elites who based their perpetuity on the danger that any real change would bring. the states ruled by them from the frying pan on the grill. Yet something else was smoldering under the ashes. Almost contradicting all reasonable predictions, we have seen the Arab masses move in the name of principles and values that we considered extraneous or in any case far from the sensibility of largely Muslim populations.

Everything happened with such rapidity and spontaneity that at first, not even those who in a certain sense expected them and would have benefited from them, hesitated to join the protests, while the country plunged into chaos, as if the very precarious socio-economic conditions were not enough. in which it poured. Soon, however, prestigious institutions such as the millennial Islamic University of al-Azhar, one of the main centers of study and orientation in all of Sunni Islam, also made their voices heard.

5.1 On the future of Egypt (21 June 2011)

بيان الأزهر ونخبة من المثقفين حول مستقبل مصر
بمبادرة كريمة من الأستاذ الدكتور/ أحمد الطيب، شيخ الأزهر، اجتمعت كوكبة من المثقفين المصريين على اختلاف انتماءاتهم الفكرية والدينية مع عدد من كبار العلماء والمفكرين في الأزهر الشريف، وتدارسوا خلال اجتماعات عدة مقتضيات اللحظة التاريخية الفارقة التي تمر بها مصر بعد ثورة الخامس والعشرين من يناير، وأهميتها في توجيه مستقبل مصر نحو غاياته النبيلة، وحقوق شعبها في الحرية والكرامة والمساواة والعدالة الاجتماعية. وقد توافق المجتمعون على ضرورة تأسيس مسيرة الوطن على مبادئ كلية، وقواعد شاملة، تناقشها قوى المجتمع المصري، وتستبصر في سيرها بالخطى الرشيدة؛ لتصل في النهاية إلى الأطر الفكرية الحاكمة لقواعد المجتمع ونهجه السليم. واعترافاً من الجميع بدور الأزهر القيادي في بلورة الفكر الإسلامي الوسطي السديد؛ فإن المجتمعين يؤكدون أهميته واعتباره المنارة الهادية التي يستضاء بها، ويحتكم إليها في تحديد علاقة الدولة بالدين، وبيان أسس السياسة الشرعية الصحيحة التي ينبغي انتهاجها؛ ارتكازاً على خبرته المتراكمة وتاريخه العلمي والثقافي الذي ارتكز على الأبعاد التالية:
البعد الفقهي في إحياء علوم الدين وتجديدها، طبقاً لمذهب أهل السنة والجماعة الذي يجمع بين العقل والنقل، ويكشف عن قواعد التأويل المرعية للنصوص الشرعية.

- البعد التاريخي لدور الأزهر المجيد في قيادة الحركة الوطنية نحو الحرية والاستقلال
- البعد الحضاري لإحياء مختلف العلوم الطبيعية والآداب والفنون بتنوعاتها الخصبة
- البعد العملي في قيادة حركة المجتمع، وتشكيل قادة الرأي في الحياة المصرية
- البعد الجامع للعلم والريادة والنهضة والثقافة في الوطن العربي والعالم الإسلامي

وقد حرص المجتمعون على أن يستلهموا في مناقشتهم روح تراث أعلام الفكر والنهضة والتقدم والإصلاح في الأزهر الشريف، ابتداء من شيخ الإسلام، الشيخ حسن العطار، وتلميذه الشيخ رفاعة الطهطاوي، إلى الإمام محمد عبده، وتلاميذه وأئمة المجتهدين من علمائه؛ من أمثال المراغي ومحمد عبد الله دراز ومصطفى عبد الرزاق وشلتوت، وغيرهم من شيوخ الإسلام وعلمائه إلى يوم الناس هذا. كما استلهموا في الوقت نفسه إنجازات كبار المثقفين المصريين ممن شاركوا في التطور المعرفي والإنساني، وأسهموا في تشكيل العقل المصري والعربي الحديث في نهضته المتجددة، من رجال الفلسفة والقانون والأدب والفنون، وغيرها من المعارف التي صاغت الفكر والوجدان والوعي العام، اجتهدوا في كل ذلك، وركزوا في وضع القواسم المشتركة بينهم جميعاً، تلك القواسم التي تهدف إلى الغاية السامية التي يرتضيها الجميع من عقلاء الأمة وحكمائها، والتي تتمثل في الآتي: تحديد المبادئ الحاكمة لفهم علاقة الإسلام بالدولة في المرحلة الدقيقة الراهنة، وذلك في إطار استراتيجية توافقية، ترسم شكل الدولة العصرية المنشودة، ونظام الحكم فيها، وتدفع بالأمة في طريق الانطلاق نحو التقدم الحضاري، بما يحقق عملية التحول الديمقراطي، ويضمن العدالة الاجتماعية، ويكفل لمصر دخول عصر إنتاج المعرفة والعلم وتوفير الرخاء والسلم، مع الحفاظ على القيم الروحية والإنسانية والتراث الثقافي؛ وذلك حماية للمبادئ الإسلامية التي استقرت في وعي الأمة وضمير العلماء والمفكرين من التعرض للإغفال والتشويه أو الغلو وسوء التفسير، وصوناً لها من استغلال مختلف التيارات المنحرفة، التي قد ترفع شعارات دينية طائفية أو أيولوجية تتنافى مع ثوابت أمتنا ومشركاتها، وتحيد عن نهج الاعتدال والوسطية، وتناقض جوهر الإسلام في الحرية والعدل والمساواة، وتبعد عن سماحة الأديان السماوية كلها. من هنا نعلن توافقنا -نحن المجتمعين- على المبادئ التالية لتحديد طبيعة المرجعية الإسلامية النيرة، التي تتمثل أساساً في عدد من القضايا الكلية، المستخلصة من النصوص الشرعية القطعية الثبوت والدلالة، بوصفها المعبرة عن الفهم الصحيح للدين، ونجملها في المحاور التالية:

أولاً: دعم تأسيس الدولة الوطنية الدستورية الديمقراطية الحديثة، التي تعتمد على دستور ترتضيه الأمة، يفصل بين سلطات الدولة ومؤسساتها القانونية الحاكمة، ويحدد إطار الحكم، ويضمن الحقوق والواجبات لكل أفرادها على قدم المساواة، بحيث تكون سلطة التشريع فيها لنواب الشعب؛ بما يتوافق مع المفهوم الإسلامي الصحيح، حيث لم يعرف الإسلام لا في تشريعاته ولا حضارته ولا تاريخه ما يُعرف في الثقافات الأخرى بالدولة الدينية الكهنوتية التي تسلطت على الناس، وعانت منها البشرية في بعض مراحل التاريخ، بل ترك للناس إدارة مجتمعاتهم، واختيار الآليات والمؤسسات المحققة لمصالحهم؛ شريطة أن تكون المبادئ الكلية للشريعة الإسلامية هي المصدر الأساس للتشريع، وبما يضمن لأتباع الديانات السماوية الأخرى الاحتكام إلى شرائعهم الدينية في قضايا الأحوال الشخصية .

ثانياً: اعتماد النظام الديمقراطي القائم على الانتخاب الحر المباشر، الذي هو الصيغة العصرية لتحقيق مبادئ الشورى الإسلامية بما يضمنه من تعددية، ومن تداول سلمي للسلطة، ومن تحديد للاختصاصات ومراقبة لأداء ومحاسبة للمسؤولين أمام ممثلي الشعب، وتوخي منافع الناس ومصالحهم العامة في جميع التشريعات والقرارات، وإدارة شؤون الدولة بالقانون -والقانون وحده- وملاحقة الفساد، وتحقيق الشفافية التامة، وحرية الحصول على المعلومات وتداولها .

ثالثاً: الالتزام بمنظومة الحريات الأساسية في الفكر والرأي، مع الاحترام الكامل لحقوق الإنسان والمرأة والطفل، والتأكيد على مبدأ التعددية، واحترام الأديان السماوية، واعتبار المواطنة مناط المسؤولية في المجتمع.

رابعاً: الاحترام التام لآداب الاختلاف وأخلاقيات الحوار، وضرورة اجتناب التكفير والتخوين واستغلال الدين، واستخدامه لبعث الفرقة والتنازع والعداء بين المواطنين، مع اعتبار الحث على الفتنة الطائفية والدعوات العنصرية جريمة في حق الوطن، ووجوب اعتماد الحوار المتكافئ، والاحترام المتبادل، والتعويل عليهما في التعامل بين فئات الشعب المختلفة، دون أي تفرقة في الحقوق والواجبات بين جميع المواطنين.

خامساً: تأكيد الالتزام بالمواثيق والقرارات الدولية، والتمسك بالمنجزات الحضارية في العلاقات الإنسانية، المتوافقة مع التقاليد السمة للثقافة الإسلامية والعربية، والمتسقة مع الخبرة الحضارية الطويلة للشعب المصري في عصوره المختلفة، وما قدمه من نماذج فائقة في التعايش السلمي، ونشيدان الخير للإنسانية كلها .
سادساً: الحرص التام على صيانة كرامة الأمة المصرية، والحفاظ على عزتها الوطنية، وتأكيد الحماية التامة والاحترام الكامل لدور العبادة لاتباع الديانات السماوية الثلاثة، وضمان الممارسة الحرة لجميع الشعائر الدينية دون أية معوقات، واحترام جميع مظاهر العبادة بمختلف أشكالها، دون تسفيه لثقافة الشعب، أو تشويه لتقاليد الأصيل، وكذلك الحرص التام على صيانة حرية التعبير والإبداع الفني والأدبي في إطار منظومة قيمنا الحضارية الثابتة .

سابعاً: اعتبار التعليم والبحث العلمي ودخول عصر المعرفة قاطرة التقدم الحضاري في مصر، وتكريس كل الجهود لتدارك ما فاتنا في هذه المجالات، وحشد طاقة المجتمع كله لمحو الأمية، واستثمار الثروة البشرية، وتحقيق المشروعات المستقبلية الكبرى.

ثامناً: إعمال فقه الأولويات في تحقيق التنمية والعدالة الاجتماعية، ومواجهة الاستبداد، ومكافحة الفساد والقضاء على البطالة، وبما يفجر طاقات المجتمع وإبداعاته في الجوانب الاقتصادية والبرامج الاجتماعية والثقافية والإعلامية، على أن يأتي ذلك على رأس الأولويات التي يتبناها شعبنا في نهضته الراهنة، مع اعتبار الرعاية الصحية الحقيقية والجادة واجب الدولة تجاه كل المواطنين جميعاً .

تاسعاً: بناء علاقات مصر بأشقائها العرب ومحيطها الإسلامي ودائرتها الإفريقية والعالمية، ومناصرة الحق الفلسطيني، والحفاظ على استقلال الإرادة المصرية، واسترجاع الدور القيادي التاريخي على أساس التعاون على الخير المشترك، وتحقيق مصلحة الشعوب في إطار من الندية والاستقلال التام، ومتابعة المشاركة في الجهد الإنساني النبيل لتقدم البشرية، والحفاظ على البيئة، وتحقيق السلام العادل بين الأمم .

عاشراً: تأييد مشروع استقلال مؤسسة الأزهر، وعودة «هيئة كبار العلماء»، واختصاصها بترشيح واختيار شيخ الأزهر، والعمل على تجديد مناهج التعليم الأزهرية؛ ليسترد دوره الفكري الأصيل، وتأثيره العالمي في مختلف الأنحاء .

حادي عشر: اعتبار الأزهر الشريف هو الجهة المختصة التي يرجع إليها في شئون الإسلام وعلومه وتراثه واجتهاداته الفقهية والفكرية الحديثة، مع عدم مصادرة حق الجميع في إبداء الرأي متى تحققت فيه الشروط العلمية اللازمة، وبشرط الالتزام بآداب الحوار، واحترام ما توافق عليه علماء الأمة .

ويُهب علماء الأزهر والمنقون المشاركون في إعداد هذا البيان بكل الأحزاب والاتجاهات السياسية المصرية أن تلتزم بالعمل على تقدم مصر؛ سياسياً واقتصادياً واجتماعياً، في إطار المحددات الأساسية التي وردت في هذا البيان .

والله الموفق لما فيه خير الأمة مشيخة الأزهر في: ١٧ من رجب سنة ١٤٣٢هـ/ ١٩ من يونيو سنة ٢٠١١

At the beginning it seems inevitable to us at least a mention of the famous essay *Mustaqbal al-thaqafa fi Misr* by Taha Husayn, echoing in the title which, however, is not limited to the field of culture (very often referred to in the text). Although the work of the great intellectual was essentially concerned with education and upbringing, the breadth of his interests, the depth of his considerations and his commitment even in political roles lead us not to consider this document completely disconnected from a capital work. of the reformist thought of modern Egypt.

The introduction credits the Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayyib with the initiative to convene a series of meetings between al-Azhar specialists and other intellectuals to discuss the numerous issues raised by the 'January 25 revolution' which led to a point of the situation in Egypt was a historical turning point, which required to be directed towards worthy outcomes in favor of the rights of its population in terms of 'freedom, dignity, equality and social justice'.

The first and third terms also belong to a secular ethics, already expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 or, even earlier, in that of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 (however made "en présence et sous les auspices de l'Être Suprême ", even though it was a" theism "far removed from classical religious traditions), perhaps emphasizing first of all the principles of freedom and equality, the most difficult ever to guarantee and still today exploitable by opposing factions. In the case of freedom it is easy for someone to consider that there is too much of it and to be annoyed by anyone who even thinks differently and limits themselves to saying it, while to others it never seems to be enough, to the point of advocating a sort of anarchy or general deregulation. Equality, then, so linked to the economy and equal rights and opportunities for all, albeit rhetorically invoked, is turning out to be almost a chimera even in the West where inequalities are growing. Finally, if we talk about freedom and equality to protect entire ethnic, linguistic or religious groups, it is not uncommon for this to be considered a threat if not an attack on States and Nations that want to be homogeneous and fear above all claims of autonomy, if not of independence of entire territories, as in fact it is happening. If in Europe the most recent and well-known cases

are those of Catalonia and Scotland, in the Near and Middle East the Kurdish question or split between Sunnis and Shiites, on the other hand, has a centuries-old history and much more dramatic effects. It should also be noted that, while freedom and equality can be decided and guaranteed by systems and rules, brotherhood is first of all a condition to be recognized and then to be lived coherently as a choice to be continuously redecided; establishing it with more than illusory regulations would be ridiculous. A "feel-good" reading of the term brotherhood risks weakening it. We do not choose brothers and sisters, as well as parents and children, in short, relatives and even neighbors or classmates and colleagues. The relationship is both indispensable and conflicting. Indeed, the more important it is, the more it harbings of possible tensions.

Friendship and friendship are basically positive words, but we know well that it is no coincidence that differences and quarrels in family and friends make us suffer more than anything else. When a bond is strong or essential, by its nature it can become problematic at times when communication becomes difficult or hostile. There are countless occasions in which these relationships are put to the test: at the time of important choices, such as the course of study, profession, marriage ... has accustomed to considering them exclusively individual options, previously this has not always been the case and even now there can be interference and even real clashes in the event that the "group" does not share the intentions of the individual or for some reason totally disapproves of them. If material interests overlap, as in the case of bequests and inheritances, it is not uncommon to see the sad spectacle of members of the same family who cease all relationships for years or permanently.

The defendants agree on the need for a confrontation between the forces of the country based on fundamental principles and rules that point in the right direction. Al-Azhar's authority and position are based on his 'moderate and fair' Islamic orientation rooted in Muslim sources that delimit relations between state and religion based on the *siyāsa sha'riyya* which is grounded in historical experience and includes following dimensions (see below):

the term '*siyāsa sha'riyya*' can generically mean 'politics based on *shari'a*', but its 'historical foundation' and the knowledge of the wise editors of the document

lead to the exclusion that there is no reference to the title of the famous work at –Mawardi (d. 1058 CE), which has become an essential point of reference for those who would have followed him. of the sources put in place is only a post eventum justification of the precedents ratified by the *ijmā'*. The famous treaty of al–Mawardi intended to reaffirm the authority of the Abbasid caliphs vis–à–vis the Buwayhidi emirs and it is significant to note that the latter, while exercising their de facto power, they nevertheless felt the need to formally place themselves at the service of the legitimate caliph and how his authority was emphasized with religious connotations just as it was weakening in the facts. The objective was evidently that of ensuring unity, order and stability to the Umma, to the point of admitting the legitimacy of the usurpers themselves, as when listing the possible causes of limitations or restrictions on the imam's freedom to act. While reporting the different opinions in this regard, al–Mawardi sides with those who consider the imamate founded on revelation rather than on reason.

The jurist Abū Yūsuf (d. 798) had already referred to similar traditions, but we must take into account the different and sometimes opposite interpretation to which some of them lend themselves: for example, the prophetic saying that urges to obey the imam "even if it were an Abyssinian slave" could have a certain meaning on the lips of those who contested the privileges of a ruling dynasty, against which the Bedouin egalitarian spirit was reiterated, but had a very different one when on the basis of it it was intended to validate the power of non–Arab military leaders whose authority had effectively imposed itself within the Muslim empire.

We thus again to the ambivalence of the attitude of Islamic thought regarding the political problem return: «From the earliest times, the politics! tradition of Islam, on the one hand as formulated in Islamic theology and law, on the other band as expressed in the accepted version of early Islamic history, contains two distinct and in some measure even contradictory principles concerning the problems of government and obedience, of which one might be described as authoritarian and quietist, the other as radical and activist”⁶ On the other hand, the Prophet himself had carried out the two functions in the different periods of his life: before the hegira (622) the message he was carrying contained elements that definitely contested some aspects of the society to which the preaching was addressed, while after that date, in Medina, the new community formed on the

basis of adherence to Islam was called to cohesion, avoiding conflicts and divisions within it, squeezed around the figure of the Prophet whose authority it unconditionally recognized.

At the time of al-Mawardi, the caliph was in part ousted by his protectors on duty: it was during the life of this author that he passed from the Buwayhite to the Seljuk protection. With regard to one or the other it was necessary to reaffirm the authority of the caliph, refusing to see him reduced to a purely symbolic figure. Al-Mawardi thus took care, dealing with the conferral or recognition of the offices of vizier and emir (respectively for administrative and military matters), to bring them back at least formally under the authority of the caliph so that the situations that in fact they were produced within an acceptable overall framework. Thus the distinction between caliphate and sultanate was gradually passed.

The re-establishment of Sunni orthodoxy at the expense of the now waning Shiite threat had as its counterpart the recognition of a de facto situation in which the stability of the caliphate authority was guaranteed by the Turkish military element.

a) the fiqh dimension of the revitalization and renewal of religious sciences (al-Ghazali), based on the Sunni orientation that combines reason and tradition based on the pastoral interpretation of Sharia texts

It is probably no coincidence that the non-explicit citation of one of the major works of the 12th century Sunni theologian al-Ghazali, in which also emerges the concern to preserve the Umma from internal divisions and disagreements through a correct relationship between sovereignty (*hukm*) and temporal power (*sultân*), within a conception that sees politics as a necessary tool for the realization of the ends of religion and morality. The fact that he affirms that the imamate is to be considered necessary both for revealed dispositions and for rational reasons confirms the role that this author had in the reception, within Islamic "orthodoxy", of the vocabulary and philosophical arguments, to the excesses of which, however, he was strenuously opposed, so much so that he was known as a sort of antagonist of *falsafa*, as evidenced by his famous controversy with Ibn Rushd.

Faced with the emergencies of his time, al-Ghazali was not content with claiming that the source of the Caliph's authority was God himself (through the *shari'a* of

which he was the guardian) or the consensus of the Umma under which he was designated. Jurists and community were certainly two important elements, but too indefinite to address the question of the effective exercise of authority: practice prevailed over theory and the caliph had had a recognition of his power mainly on the basis of what he actually did rather than on its theoretical status. Finding himself now progressively deprived of authority, it was necessary to re-establish contact with the effective exercise of authority rather than delay in justifying its legitimacy in principle. Leaning on the sultan, holder of coercive power, the caliph gave substance to his own authority which could not remain merely symbolic; vice versa, the sultan, recognizing the authority of the Caliph, inserted his practical action of government within the framework of Islamic tradition and law and their purposes, guaranteeing their continuity for the benefit of the community of believers.

The role of the latter is therefore emphasized since they have the competence that guarantees compliance with the norms of the shar'i'a, but no less important is the function of authority, so indispensable as to induce very large concessions.

In this, as in other passages of his works dedicated to politics, al-Ghazali demonstrates that he is aware of the real state of things which he nevertheless accepted as a lesser evil than the danger of civil war (*fitna*) and anarchy.

b) the historical dimension of al-Azhar's role in leading the nation towards freedom and independence.

The millennial history of al-Azhar and its relations with the rulers deserves a separate study⁷, since its foundation in the period of the domination of a Shiite Caliph of the Fatimid dynasty (contemporary to the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad and the neo-Umayyad caliph of Andalusia). Even though we have to give up a summary chronology, given also (but not only) the space-time dimensions that it would entail, we limit ourselves to noting that in the Sunni context (90% of Muslims) it is not correct, as it often happens, to speak of theocracy as defined by Treccani. Absolutely with regard to the first definition: "1. State or government system in which power is exercised in the name of the divinity, by people (generally a priestly caste) who declare themselves to be its representatives by having received the mandate from it, or who present themselves as the incarnation of the same divinity ", not only for the absence of

something comparable to a 'clergy', but also and above all for the extreme difficulty in defining the nature and functions of the 'caliph' (also called 'supreme imam', therefore in some way at least guarantor of the Islamic character of power) but also to some extent of emirs, sultans or sovereigns (often presumed descendants of the Prophet) and then of presidents of the Republic or Prime Ministers whose practice of precepts and devotion is at least highly appreciated. As regards the second definition: "2. In the history of political doctrines, theory and practice for which the state and civil power must be subordinated, even if it is separate from it, to the religious, priestly or ecclesiastical one ", the various types of this relationship should be examined, moreover in the absence of a single teaching authority on the subject. The case of the Shiites or other minor ramifications is different, among which we could identify in this regard not only innumerable nuances, but divergent if not completely opposite systematisations. Even in the Sunni sphere, however, the relationship between religious institutions and political authorities could, if anything, be compared to the concept of 'caesarpapism', both for the dependence in the past of the mosque, also – but not only from a financial and appointment point of view – and more recently for the existence of a Ministry of Religious Affairs practically everywhere. Given these brief but essential premises, what seems remarkable to us here is that the majority of terms and concepts we will come across are entirely indebted to modern Western theories on the state.

c) the dimension of civilization in the renewal of the natural, literary and artistic sciences in all their various expressions.

We will return to the right to education later, here the patronage of the past is only quickly recalled, however, combined with the modern ideal of the progress of knowledge and the arts without mentioning the problematic nature of the development of biotechnologies or the distrust of the figurative arts. the music and dance that still manifests itself on various occasions.

d) the practical dimension of guiding social dynamics and in the formation of leadership and public opinion in the life of the country

Also in this case we limit ourselves to enunciating noble and general principles, without yet mentioning the strong limitations induced by one-party regimes and the control of information which often manifests itself in forms of real censorship.

e) the dimension that unites the renaissance, awakening and culture of the Arab nation and the Islamic world.

The sense of belonging to a single Community (Arab or even Muslim) remains evident, not without forms of solidarity and collaboration, but also unfortunately affected by innumerable tensions, if not by long-standing conflicts whose consequences, especially to the detriment of the civil population very rarely do leaders and religious institutions (national or even state) make their voices heard. *The attendees drew decisively in their discussions from the spirit of al-Azhar's legacy of thought, renaissance, progress and reformism, starting with Shaykh Hasan al-'Attar and his disciple Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, from 'imam Muhammad' Abduh and his students among scholars and imams such as al-Maghari, Muhammad 'Abdallah Draz, Mustafa' Abd al-Raziq, Shaltut and others up to the present day. Even this list, of Egyptians only and with significant omissions, reveals an orientation that is not explicit, but evidently in favor of certain moderate reformist voices with the probable intention of avoiding the rekindling of long-standing controversies and implicitly recognizing a stage that is taken for granted and not available to reverse.*

Likewise they drew inspiration from the great Egyptian intellectuals who contributed to the advancement of human knowledge and the modern Egyptian and Arab mentality in the era of its innovative renaissance, including philosophers and jurists, writers, artists and other specialists who shaped the awareness and collective conscience by making an effort to concentrate on placing common denominators between them and the subjects, factors aimed at high purposes and well accepted by all the scholars of the Umma and its rulers including:

to define the principles on the basis of which to understand the relationship between Islam and the state in the current and delicate situation, within the framework of a strategy of concord that defines a type of state that is currently desirable and a system of government that leads the Umma towards a path capable of to lead it to civil progress, through the realization of a transition towards democracy and social justice that allows Egypt to enter a phase of development that is a harbinger of knowledge and science, of the spread of prosperity and peace, while preserving spiritual and humanistic values of its cultural heritage including the Islamic principles on which the stability of the

awareness of the Umma rests as the conscience of the wise and intellectuals without exposing oneself to omissions, distortions, excesses or false interpretations, refraining from deviant currents that emanate sectarian slogans and ideologized, distant from what the Umma stably shares, far from the right means and in contrast with the essence of what Islam entails in terms of freedom, justice and equality and extraneous to the spirit of tolerance of all revealed religions..

Certainly one cannot avoid pointing out both the awareness of 'the current and delicate situation' and the intent to favor peace and stability, both to justify the firm but balanced tones and themes of this declaration. Although not mentioned, the trend of the so-called '*wasatiyya*' or 'moderate' view of Islam shines through. There is too much to say about this term and the debate around it. We limit ourselves to remembering that it was proposed by prof. Muhammad Kamal Hassan (Rector of the International Islamic University of Malaysia from 1999 to 2006) at the second On Terrorist Rehabilitation and community Resilience conference held in Singapore in 2013). This is not a banal advertising of principles such as 'non-violence' or 'de-radicalization'. Its foundations are traced by the Author in the basic concepts of faith (*imàn*), knowledge (*'ilm*) and submission (*taqwa*) and on the Koranic statement "We have made of you a nation that follows the middle path so that you may be witnesses to all men and the Messenger of God be a witness before you "(2, 143). Without therefore limiting himself to a mere apologetics, he concludes that the achievement of this condition depends on justice (*al-'adl*), on excellence (in his view the term *wasat* would not only mean the 'center' but 'the best') and on balance. Therefore not good intentions but a serious commitment that does not exempt from any of the Islamic precepts by adopting a lax attitude (*tafrih*), but also distant from any excess (*ifrâh*), without for this being more comfortable or condescending than the neglect of the less scrupulous, and the apparent intransigence of the fanatics.⁸

Consequently, we defendants, we are unanimous on the following points which constitute the clear Islamic reference and represent the foundation on which to base many general questions, deriving from the most solid and evident Sharia texts, a genuine source for the understanding of religion, which we condense in the following focal points:

First: starting with the modern national, constitutional and democratic state, based on a constitution recognized by the Umma, there is a distinction between the powers of state institutions and the legally governing bodies. The framework of government action is therefore limited and the rights and duties of each individual are guaranteed on the basis of the principle of equality, so that the legislative power belongs to the representatives of the people, within the boundaries of what agrees with the right Islamic conception, as Islam did not know either on a juridical level or as a civilization and history what in others was instead a confessional and clerical state that dominated the people, something that humanity has suffered in some periods, but Islam it allowed societies to administer themselves by choosing tools and institutions to achieve their own well-being, provided that in general the principles followed were the basic source of legislation, ensuring that other revealed religions followed their codes in the field of personal status.

Among the names of the scholars previously omitted are those of Rashid Rida (1935) and 'Ali' Abd Al-Ràziq (d. 1966), whose opposite theses echo in this passage of the document, with a clear preference for the latter, which not a few and harsh criticism he deserved for his famous essay of 1925 in which if not a total separation, he nevertheless proposed a clear distinction between religion and political systems, while the first, collaborator and continuator of the work of Muhammad 'Abduh had been among the pioneers of the so-called salafiyya (reformist tendency of the 'restorer' type close to the positions of the Muslim Brotherhood and similar groups) who evidently had opposing positions on the de facto abolition of the Caliphate by the leader of the newly formed secular Republic of Turkey

Second: the democratic system is based on free and direct elections, the contemporary form of the Sharia principle of Islamic consultation (shùra), which implies pluralism and peaceful alternation between governments, defining their respective competences and forms of control over their implementation , whose leaders will have to answer to the representatives of the people taking care of the needs of the people and the general well-being in every legislative provision and decision, administering the state according to the law – and only the law – fighting corruption and guaranteeing total transparency, starting the right to be informed and to inform.

That the free and direct election of one's own representatives is already included in the shari'a on the basis of the Koranic exhortation towards consultation (*shùra*) seems to us to be apologetic in character and typical of certain modernisms⁹ which admit reforms or innovations only on the condition that they are found. the justification in some precedent in their own sources. The Bedouin tribal society, fragmentary and tendentially anarchoid, had forms of mediation consisting of assemblies of elderly people, something that the Prophet encouraged knowing well the nature of his people, without however succeeding in the intent to keep united the newborn community that only thirty years after his death it would have split definitively between Sunnis and Shiites (not to mention that of the first four 'well-directed' Caliphs, three died violent deaths). After all, even in ancient Greece the term democracy designated something very different from what we mean today and we know perfectly well that reaching universal suffrage, where it happened, entailed grueling gradualness and even today someone does not hesitate to express reservations in this regard.

The reference to pluralism (of parties) and the peaceful alternation of different governments, in order to achieve the best for the population in compliance with the law (*qànùn*) and only it, in complete transparency in order to avoid forms of corruption, is not so obvious.

Regarding not only the period of the origins of Islam, but also many dynamics still detectable, a fundamental role was played by belonging to groups, clans, families ... that opposed themselves in the race for power and by always the 'religious' legitimation of one's aims has been one of the most effective tools to use, not to mention the presumption of having God himself as an ally.

In these macro phenomena a kind of 'reason of state' could, if not justify, at least explain certain behaviors. But when one passes from society as a whole to more restricted groups and individuals, albeit of varying classes and identities, it is fatal to find a trivial use of symbols and pretexts linked to faith to 'clear customs' practically anything.

Third: to systematically maintain the fundamental freedoms of thought and opinion, fully respecting the rights of men, women and children, guaranteeing pluralism and respect for revealed religions and considering citizenship as the basis of all responsibility in society.

During the Arab Springs also the absence of anti-Western slogans or hostile to imperialism, neo-colonialism and Zionism surprised many observers, and those who were able to follow more closely and in the original language the debate that opened in those exciting days he had the opportunity to see that it also concerned highly significant neologisms that we will find in the text we are about to analyze. The concept of secularism, in fact, commonly expressed in Arabic with the term *'ilmāniyya* (from *'ilm*, 'science', or from *'àlam*, 'world'), heavily dependent on rationalist or secularist conceptions that are typically European and somewhat dated, has been replaced by the term *madaniyya* (joined to *dawla*, meaning 'state') which means 'civil', not only opposed to 'military', but also to 'clerical' or 'religious' in the confessional sense.

This also explains, among other things, the decisive participation of both Arab Christians and non-radical Muslims in the upheavals that quickly led to the fall of various authoritarian regimes that had seemed immovable for many decades now.

The illegitimate use of different faiths or ideologies is obviously condemned without hesitation, which is especially true for the mutual 'excommunications' between Islamic factions through the infamous practice of takfir (anathema) which not only justifies but even favors intra-community violence virtually without limits (as happens in terrorist attacks involving countless innocent people and, in the case of the aberrant case of kamikaze, the very life of the attackers). In other points the call to respect for religious differences is also reiterated, with implicit reference to discrimination and attacks against the Coptic Egyptians. On the other hand, there is no mention of the use of religion as a form of self-legitimation of governments and regimes, perhaps giving and erroneously assuming that this can be tolerated for the purposes of greater political unity and stability, while it should be evident that it is the recourse to anathema on the part of Muslim fanatics, both Islamic-Christian tensions find in this tendency one if not the main push to assume extreme positions and practices.

Fifth: to abide by the documents and state decrees, based on the objectives achieved by civilization in human relations, in accordance with the noble practices of the Arab-Muslim culture, linked to the long experience of civilization

of the Egyptian people in various eras, providing models based on peaceful coexistence and aimed at the well-being of the whole of humanity.

If the thousand-year-old Egyptian history demonstrates on the one hand a specific and constant identity of the Nile Valley, here too an irenic vision prevails which obviously, given the purpose of the document, ignores episodes and entire periods in which, for various reasons, they occurred. counterexamples in which political and religious authorities have tolerated if not encouraged forms of sectarianism on the basis of the principle of divide and rule.

Sixth: to safeguard and maintain the dignity of the Egyptian nation, maintaining its pride by respecting in all the faith of the three revealed religions, ensuring that its religious traits are freely practiced without any compromise and preserving all its manifestations in the variety of their forms, as well as for the freedom of expression, of artistic and literary creativity within the framework of the stable system of values of our civilization.

Freedom of worship, limited to the three monotheisms and with clear discrimination against the two preceding Islam, brings to light the ambiguity of every discourse on human rights (including numerous 'Islamic' declarations of them) which present considerable differences in the versions even official in other languages and the original text in Arabic, conditioned by the limits of the shari'a especially evident in the case of gender equality and particularly that of belief, where 'other' ineligible faiths are omitted, as well as the right of Muslims to adhere to any of them (monotheistic or not) or to declare oneself agnostic if not completely atheist.

Seventh: attention to education and scientific research, entering the decisive era of cultural progress in Egypt, without sparing efforts in these sectors as far as we are concerned, making every effort to abolish illiteracy, enhancing human capital in view of ambitious projects to come.

The presence of a private school (but also health) system accessible only to the wealthiest alongside the public one of poor quality and conditioned by serious forms of corruption and patronage is not evoked, despite weighing heavily in the daily life of the majority of the population. At least a hint of forms of voluntary work and subsidies by non-governmental organizations currently and deliberately reduced, would have been desirable on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity and the role of civil society, poorly valued if not viewed with

suspicion and poorly tolerated by highly bureaucratic states. and highly centralized.

Eighth: to put in place some priorities aimed at development and social justice, opposing forms of totalitarianism, opposing corruption, issuing adequate sentences, to expand energy and creativity in the economic, social, cultural and media fields, these being the first things that can edify our population in its current renaissance, considering the role of good, authentic, serious guides a duty of the state towards all citizens.

The somewhat paternalistic tone of these statements is balanced by the reference to forms of totalitarianism, corruption and lack of trust in the judiciary that fuel popular disaffection with institutions and facilitate favoritism and recommendations that also affect the land of emigration. attitude of many Egyptians who often consider it more useful to have good connections than to demand respect for the laws, which are actually often obscure, plethoric and contradictory.

Ninth: to build partnership forms between Egypt and its brothers at the Arab and Islamic level, within the framework of its African and international position on solid foundations, with the support of the Palestinian cause, the preservation of Egyptian independence, encouraging its historic leadership on the basis of collaborations for the common good and the realization of the rights of peoples to their own interest in total independence but joining the noble effort of all humanity towards progress, environmental conservation and the realization of a just peace among nations.

It seems inevitable a reference to Nasser's Philosophy of the Revolution, which contained in a nutshell the Theory of the three circles, more fully exposed on the occasion of the first summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Bandung in 1955. The location of Egypt is above all 'Arab' and in fact, especially at that time and also thanks to the turning point due to the Ra'is, the role of the country was more important than what it would later become. The 'African' circle, on the other hand, has a historical-geographical justification at least along the course of the Nile, but it was becoming even more relevant in the period of decolonization. Finally, belonging to the 'Islamic' circle implied even wider ambitions that refer to a never dormant 'pan-Islamic' thrust which however problematically coexists with the fragmentation into national and distinctly nationalist states, concentrated in

making effective the recent conquest of independence from Western powers, but also not devoid of hegemonic ambitions especially towards other surrounding countries, no less included in the triple circle just mentioned.

Tenth: to lay the foundations for al-Azhar's independence so that it will once again become 'the institution of the greatest scholars' in what belongs to it under the guidance of its shaikh, renewing its study methodologies, bringing it back to its original intellectual role, influential in every part of the world.

Eleventh: to consider al-Azhar what it is, referring to it for religious questions and knowledge, its patrimony and its commitment in contemporary legal and intellectual fields, without excluding anyone the right to propose opinions when he has the necessary skills, is willing to dialogue and respectful of the consent of the Umma scholars. The scholars of al-Azhar and the intellectuals gathered to prepare this declaration appeal to all parties and political currents of Egypt to actively commit themselves to the progress of Egypt itself politically, economically and socially, within the framework of what has been specified and expressed in this document.

The last two points (and two out of eleven are not few) are explicitly dedicated to the role of Azhar, understandably given the situation of chaos that the country was going through: the prestige of the religious institution and its relative independence from the government on the one hand. it allowed her and, on the other hand, it required some form of stance. The tones and themes dealt with are presented in a balanced language accessible to all, with some concessions to rhetoric on the one hand inevitable in documents of this kind and on the other in keeping with Arab sensibilities. However, there is a non-formal reference to some general principles, perhaps not shared by all the interlocutors, but now widespread and rooted enough to be recalled and affirmed without too much caution. The involution of the situation of all the countries affected by the Arab Springs after those events (except perhaps in part for Tunisia) shows however that on the ground many transformations are still struggling to make their way and resignation to a 'lesser evil' known on the ground seems to prevail. ability and determination towards a change certainly longed for, but still too full of conditioning and unknowns to be able to favor risky adventurisms with respect to a certain inertia, if not compulsion to repeat, which is unavoidable in the aftermath of unfinished operations, capable of giving life to large coalitions to

counteract what is not liked, but still unable to put in place realistic and credible alternatives, probably due to the absence or fragility of assumptions that have not been imagined or implemented in the previous decades, thanks to the instability of the whole area where local problems are combined with external geopoetic influences global lithic action within the framework of a persistent and deadly generalized co-responsibility, unfortunately also found in many other contexts and precisely in these days particularly evident even with the return of real conflicts with uncertain and worrying outcomes even in Europe itself.

May God make what is good for the Umma succeed

The shaykh of al-Azhar and the defendants, June 19, 2011

Conclusion

The history of relations, even limited to Arab countries or Egypt alone, between religious and political institutions in modern and contemporary times is widely presented in numerous studies to which we refer. This short document seems to us to be worthy of particular attention for various reasons: it was drafted and issued in a moment of power vacuum, during the upheaval produced by an unprecedented general mobilization during which trends and energies that were previously hidden and also in those known have manifested diversified sensitivities and attitudes ... Understandably short and essential, it is significant both for what it says and for what it does not pronounce on. In our comments we have also tried to read between the lines and to connect the individual issues dealt with in the more general framework of a comparison that, in words and deeds, has affected the area in general and Egypt in particular for at least a couple of centuries.

¹ Cfr. M.R. Menocal, The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain. New York 2002.

² Cfr. N. Daniel, Islam and the West. The Making of an Image, London 2009.

³.A. Laroui, Islam et modernité, Paris 1986, p. 162.

⁴.A. Shariati, Histoire et destinée, Paris 1982, pp. 110.

⁵.Fazlur Rahman, Islam and Modernity, Chicago 1984, pp. 136-137.

⁶ Lewis, Bernard. "On the Quietist and Activist Traditions in Islamic Political Writing." Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, vol. 49, no. 1, 1986, p. 141.

⁷ M. Zeghal, *Gardiens de l'Islam. Les oulémas d'Al Azhar dans l'Egypte contemporaine*, Paris 1996; T. Moustafa, "Conflict and Cooperation between the State and Religious Intitutions in Contemporary Egypt", in *International Journal of Middle East Affairs*, 32.1 (2000), pp. 3-32; H. Meir, "Historical Legacy and the Challenge of Modernity in the Middle East: The Case of Al-Azhar in Egypt", in *The Muslim World*, 93.1 (2003), pp. 51-68; Y, Elgendi, "Modernizing Religious Discourses and Theologies of Pluralism: a Comparison between the Azhar and the Holy See", in *Annali di Studi Religiosi*, 14/2021, pp. 323-351.

⁸ Cfr. Muhammad Hanif Hassan, "Wastiyya as Explained by prof. Muhammad Kamal Hassan: Justice, Excellence and Balance", in *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, vol. 6, n. 2/2014, RSIS, Singapore.

⁹ Cfr. A. di Nola, "Per una tipologia dei modernismi", in *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, n. 35/2 (1975), pp. 1-8.