A Review of the Second Founding of the Muslim Brotherhood and Its Vision in Modern Contexts



The 28 Podcast platform featured an important interview with Dr. Abdel Moneim El‑Barbary, a leader in the Muslim Brotherhood, former head of the Department of Anatomy at Menoufia University, and former president of Lakeside University in Accra, Ghana. The interview highlighted the key milestones of this movement over nearly a century, as well as its vision for its role in today's world—addressing the nation's needs and fulfilling its original purpose.

The Origins and Formation of the Muslim Brotherhood

The group formed in Egypt out of a need at the individual, societal, and state levels. It expanded across society because of its blend of powerful, reformist, Salafi, nationalist, and Sufi educational elements, with equal parts of each, and without bias toward any specific trend. It spread quickly to many Islamic countries due to the nation's need to advance the Islamic project after the abolition of the Caliphate and the disappearance of a state that safeguarded that project.

Imam al‑Banna was eager to follow the law that banned registered associations from getting involved in politics, so he prohibited the association from engaging in political activities. When he wanted to participate in politics, he transformed the association into a group, as allowed by the constitution. Later, he converted it into a comprehensive Islamic body after the 1944 law was issued to ensure compliance.

Who is the Muslim Brotherhood?

The Muslim Brotherhood sees itself as an Islamic group rooted in specific religious and moral values. However, they do not consider anyone who is not a member to be outside of Islam or sinful. Their core identity is centered on embracing the Islamic project, which involves spreading the Islamic message and establishing an Islamic state based on Sharia. A key goal shared by members is educating Muslims about Islamic values and participating in collective actions to achieve the broader aims of the Islamic nation. In this context, Al-Barbari views the Muslim Brotherhood not just as a political movement but as a call with a long-term vision aimed at reforming both individuals and society.

Motives and Incentives for Membership

The motives and incentives include a desire to please God, an understanding of the importance of guiding humanity toward God's path, a sense of personal responsibility for this task, a belief that the effort must be collective, confidence in the Muslim Brotherhood's suitability for this role, and an acceptance of bearing the burdens and costs of this work in accordance with the law of Waraqa ibn Nawfal.

The Beginnings of Dr. Abdel Moneim El-Barbary's Joining the Muslim Brotherhood.

Dr. Abdel Moneim El-Barbary's decision to join the Muslim Brotherhood was not made lightly. Instead, it stemmed from an intellectual journey and practical experience that began before he officially joined the group. In the 1960s, El-Barbary was dedicated to nationalism and patriotism until the 1967 setback, which marked a decisive turning point in his outlook. He then realized that the solution was not in nationalism or patriotism but in Islam. Even though the Brotherhood was imprisoned at that time, their influence was visible through preachers like Sheikh Suleiman Hassan Rabie, who helped them understand the all-encompassing nature of Islam as a way of life, and that distancing themselves from it was what caused the setback.

At university, Al-Barbari and a group of students started spreading these Islamic ideas, forming religious groups separate from the student union, which was controlled by communists. With the rise of the hijab and the subsequent press criticism, they engaged in debates and defensive campaigns, leading them to adopt Islamic appearances and conduct scientific research to support their beliefs against the takfir (excommunication) scandal that spread through the university in 1972. Al-Barbari found intellectual support in the book "Preachers, Not Judges" by Professor Hassan al-Hudaybi, which showed him the depth of the Brotherhood's thought and its capacity for serious Islamic work. This later motivated him to officially join the group after the main group was released from prison in 1974.

Renewal and Evolution of the Brotherhood's Concept

The Muslim Brotherhood did not invent a new idea but rather revived the concept of Islam as a comprehensive way of life. Although the foundations on which the Brotherhood was built were traditional Islamic principles, Imam al Banna added innovative touches to keep pace with contemporary changes. One of the most prominent features of this renewal was the blending of different intellectual currents, such as Salafism, renewal, and struggle, which helped spread the idea. The Brotherhood is widely known.

Constants and Variables in the Group

All our constants are Islamic, but they fall into two main categories. The constants of Islam include three types: the fundamental components, such as divine nature, comprehensiveness, universality, and personal responsibility. The

second type consists of foundational principles, like the Five Pillars of Islam, the Six Pillars of Faith, the Six Principles of Jurisprudence, and ethics. The third type encompasses the supreme obligations, which are known by necessity from the religion, such as consultation, jihad, justice, freedom, and loyalty.

The Brotherhood's constants are divided into three areas: first, the constants of thought and perception, which include the twenty principles, six motives and motivations, and the constants of the change methodology; second, the constants of structure and organization; and third, the constants of movement and action.

In this dialogue, he explained the motives, motivations, and constants of the change methodology, saying: "Grounded, not superficial; deep, not superficial; gradual, not immediate; voluntary, not coercive; global, not regional, stable, not temporary. We lead the nation to it, not acting as its representative."

The group advocates a radical approach to change that starts with society rather than authorities. It relies on persuasion instead of coercion and emphasizes gradualism over leapfrogging, considering people's readiness for change. The Brotherhood's ideology is also characterized by its comprehensiveness, meaning that Islam, for them, encompasses all aspects of life, at all times and in all places.

While the group is committed to following its principles, it also welcomes change, allowing for interpretations and adjustments based on circumstances, aiming to balance maintaining its identity and adapting to reality.

"There is no compulsion in religion" and the idea of freedom

The Brotherhood's concept of "there is no compulsion in religion" is a broad idea that goes beyond simply rejecting the forced conversion of non-Muslims to Islam. It also emphasizes respecting individuals' freedom to choose their faith and prohibits any group from forcing its beliefs on others.

The Role of Women in the Brotherhood

Although the organization of women's work within the Muslim Brotherhood was delayed until the early 1990s due to security and social conditions, the formation of the Muslim Sisters' Section marked a significant turning point in the organization's development. Credit for this goes to Muhammad Hussein of Alexandria, who led a field experiment that later expanded to other governorates.

The official founding of the section took place after a leadership meeting in 1991 and was organized professionally, with participation from notable field leaders such as Sheikh Al-Khatib and Sirag Al-Laboudi.

The section contributed to the development of advanced educational programs aimed at women, such as the "Gardens of Paradise" curriculum, and created new training tools like the "Trainers of Trainers" program. The significant influx of girls into universities was a major factor in structuring women's work to shield it from the influence of other movements.

Despite its apparent delay, the section managed to fill a significant gap and showcase the active involvement of women in the Brotherhood's advocacy and organizational efforts.

Youth and Leadership in the Brotherhood

Since the Brotherhood's founding, leadership has played a key role in its activities. Dr. Al-Barbari states that earlier generations were eager to pass leadership to their youth. However, the current generation has notprovided the same opportunities, leading to a generational gap.

Shura Within the Brotherhood

Although the Brotherhood has maintained its administrative structures since it was founded, the practice of Shura within the organization has gone through periods of restriction and openness, shaped by security and political factors. Security surveillance prevented elections for administrative positions until 1990, and work has continued under conservative arrangements since the Brotherhood's release from prison in the 1970s.

However, some mentors were eager to promote the value of shura, such as Omar al-Telmisani, who gave youth the chance to participate, and Muhammad Hamid Abu al-Nasr, who distinguished between binding shura and obligatory advice. The approaches of his successors varied: from Mustafa Mashhour, who preferred calm guidance and including outside circles, to Mamoun al-Hudaybi, who focused on the jurisprudence of reality and protecting the group, to Muhammad Mahdi Akef, who was known for political openness and engaging youth, and finally Muhammad Badi', who concentrated on organizing and resolving conflicts within prisons between prisoners and the prison authorities, especially in the case of unionists.

The Muslim Brotherhood's Worldwide Growth and Political Influence

The Muslim Brotherhood has gained widespread influence in over 80 countries worldwide, from East to West, making it—according to many historians—the largest political group with a global Islamic identity.

This expansion resulted from several factors: a genuine need among Muslim communities for an organized ideology that addressed their religious and social concerns. Additionally, the clarity and consistency of the Brotherhood's approach fostered a sense of reassurance among its followers. Early immigrants, particularly during the Nasser era in the 1950s and 1960s, played a key role in establishing advocacy outside Egypt, supported by trusted leaders such as Ahmed al-Malt and Muhammad Mahdi Akef.

The Brotherhood's expansion has been organized since the era of Imam al-Banna, who established Brotherhood branches in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine. Despite this expansion, the Brotherhood's influence in Arab countries varies greatly. The Brotherhood's presence is gauged by its level of participation in political life, the scope of community services, the degree of understanding with regimes, and the extent to which authorities acknowledge their presence, even if they do not officially recognize them.

The Brotherhood—with its internationalist ideology—posed a challenge to regionalist regimes, making some governments wary of its rhetoric calling for the unity of the Islamic nation. With the new waves of immigration after 2013, Western concern about the group grew, not because of violence but because of its ability to spread subtly through persuasion and gradualism. This is seen as a threat to some societal values in the West, through dialogue rather than subversion.

Despite the different circumstances of the first and second migrations, the Brotherhood's leaders and members still viewed its missionary work as a message that does not end with relocation or changing situations.

The Muslim Brotherhood's Time in Power (2012–2013)

Dr. Al¬Barbari argues that the Brotherhood's time in power in Egypt was not a complete failure, but rather a failure caused by exceptional and complicated circumstances. The Brotherhood took control during a political and social environment that was not ready for a radical Islamist project, and the group faced strong resistance from both internal and external forces who feared its success and influence.

Regional and international interventions also significantly hindered the Brotherhood's ability to fully carry out its vision. Furthermore, President Mohamed Morsi was unable to obtain the essential tools for governance and control, ¬as the deep state and security institutions constantly opposed him, making the situation even more complex. Dr. Al Barbari claims that if the Brotherhood had been allowed to operate freely and without pressure, they could have achieved genuine and sustainable success.

This alarmed their opponents, who did not hesitate to overthrow them through a military coup, preventing what they called "500 years of Brotherhood rule." This experience reflects the reality of the challenges faced by Islamic movements in turbulent political environments and highlights the importance of enabling conditions and popular and environmental support for successful governance.

Advice for New Generations and the Future of the Islamic Project

Dr. Abdel Moneim emphasizes that the relationship with God is the foundation, while prioritizing education and spreading the Islamic message as key to attracting a new generation of youth. Political action is an important tool, but it should not overshadow other aspects of advocacy and organization. Ongoing education and training are crucial to maintaining the quality of new recruits. Regarding the future of the Islamic project and the Muslim Brotherhood, the doctor highlights that political action is part of a larger effort focused on building an integrated and secure society. The project is not judged solely by establishing a stable state but progresses through multiple stages. Despite setbacks following the Arab Spring, the project remains viable and needs continuous renewal, because the Muslim Brotherhood, as a historical entity, experiences cycles of renewal and development.

His Vision for Achieving Success in Creating a State for the Islamic Project

Success in establishing a state for the Islamic project depends on regional and global conditions that are currently unfavorable. The project needs a new approach focused on "leadership of division" and the division of roles so that Muslims can avoid efforts to deny them the qualifications necessary to effectively manage the state. Although establishing an Islamic state is not possible right now, it is possible to work toward consolidating the idea and achieving growth and expansion, as the state will form when the conditions are right.

What is needed now is to mobilize people in line with the "comprehensiveness of Islam" and to work toward building informal cooperation among Muslim economists, Muslim scholars, and other specialized groups as a foundation for future Islamic unity. Renewal is necessary while staying true to principles because each era has its own style and innovations, and this is what Imam Al¬Banna called for.