Preaching Islamic Renewal:
Shaykh Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī and the Snyncretization of Revelation and Contemporary Life.

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Abstract

The ulamā’ in Egypt are still actively provide believers with the means of utilizing Islamic foundational texts in their every day lives. Even though their role as intermediaries has been curtailed in recent times, they have still been able to invent new ways to ensure their continued relevancy, combining a past history of involvement with the sources with present reality. They have been able to do this because part of the responsibility of the ulamā’ has always been to adapt contingencies to knowledge gained from the Qur’an and hadith, defending against them when necessary and syncretizing changed circumstances with revelatory understanding when possible. Some classes of ulamā’, especially the preachers, have also had the responsibility to convey these defenses and reformulations to the public.

In this dissertation by examining the life and discourses of one ‘alim–preacher, Muḥammad Mitwalli Sha‘rāwī (died 1998), I will show that ‘ulama authority continues in Egypt and that, through preaching, their articulated adaptations are still effectively conveyed to the people. Sha‘rāwī provided the people with a way to integrate the current reality of their lives into their religious faith without completely rejecting modern life or compromising the principles of adherence to Islam. But religious truth always took precedence for Sha‘rāwī which meant that contingencies were always modified if they were to be accepted. In addition he always weighed any new information against knowledge as he understood it from the Qu’ran and hadith.

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Dedication

The completion of a dissertation involves the effort of many people, even if only one person actually writes it. To begin with I would like to thank my advisor Professor Abdulaziz Sachedina, of the University of Virginia, for encouraging me throughout these years, and for always understanding the special challenges that face a graduate student who is also a mother. I feel fortunate to have had an advisor who is a formidable scholar in the field, and who always has the highest expectations of his students as a result. I also want to thank the other members of my dissertation committee, from the University of Virginia, Peter Ochs, Cindy Hoehler-Fatton and Elizabeth Thompson, for all of their helpful, thorough comments and suggestions.

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To the memory of my grandmother, Selma Leabman, my only regret is that she is not here to hold a copy of my dissertation in her hands.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my family, my husband John Brinton and my children Lilias, Maya and Noah Brinton. To John, this dissertation never would have come to fruition if it weren't for your constant love, support and assistance; surely it is your accomplishment as much as it is mine. To Lilias, Maya and Noah, I spent a good part of your early lives being both your mother and a graduate student. Without the constant joy and love we shared during those years, my life as a student would have been very bleak indeed. This dissertation is a testament to the power of the love and support all four of you have given me over the years.

Introduction

While I was in Cairo in 2005 I became aware of a group of television preachers who had become very influential in the religious lives of Egyptian Muslims. Many of these preachers were religious scholars (*'ulamā'*) trained at al-Azhar who espoused moderate, politically acceptable, ideas of contemporary religion in current language. They were also and inspiring a revitalization of religious participation among the people and an increased attachment to the foundational texts and teachings of Islam. My observations, however, were not reflected in much of the scholarship on modern Islam that I was familiar with, which often portrayed religious resurgence in places like Egypt as being either far removed from traditional[1] sources or, alternatively, as being inspired by the Qur'an and ḥadīth in a very direct way.[2]

Both of these accounts overlook traditional religious intermediaries, such as the 'ulamā', that are commonly employed by religious adherents to bridge the gap between themselves and the divine revelation. Since the Qur'an and ḥadīth are difficult for

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[1] Throughout this dissertation I will use the word "tradition" to refer to, "'a personally guaranteed connection with a model past and especially with model persons, offer(ing) the only sound basis for forming and reforming one's society in any age.'" William Graham as quoted by Qasim Zaman in: *The 'Ulamā' in Contemporary Islam*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 3. Zaman goes on to say that "it is the recurrent effort by Muslims to articulate authority and evaluate claims to such authority by positioning and reaffirming a connection to the past…what remains key to their constitutions is a history of argument and debate over certain fundamental doctrines in shared languages and styles of discourse" (3-4).

[2] The modern intellectuals associated with the former thought are often labeled "modernist" or "liberal." Those associated with the second type of movement are often labeled "fundamentalist," "Islamist" or even, more recently, as "Wahhābī."

believers to interpret on their own, the ulamā' have served as mediators between God's words and the people throughout Islamic history[3]. 'Ulamā' hermeneutics, and the history of their interpretations, have formed the basis of law, practice and belief in Islam, and the 'ulamā' have continually clarified and built upon those foundations. Their role as intermediaries, until modern times, was manifested in different ways; through Quranic exegesis, juridical texts and legal rulings, and sermons and instruction delivered directly to the people. In all of these forms of discourse the 'ulamā' were considered, because of their special training, to be crucial in clarifying God's intentions for humanity as they are revealed in the Qur'an and ḥadīth. 'Ulamā' interpretations of revelation, put forth as texts and articulations, have been essential to believers by helping them determine how to live in conformity God disclosures.

Part of the responsibility of the 'ulamā' has always been to adapt every day contingencies to revelatory knowledge, defending against them when necessary and

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[3] The content of ulamā' responsibility has changed over the course of that history. Marshall Hodgson connects the rise of an 'ulamā' class in Sunni Islam to the beginnings of the four legal schools. And although he associated the ulamā' class with *'ilm* (knowledge) he also acknowledged that the word has developed over time. He claims that the precursors of the ulamā' were the "piety-minded." Hodgson uses piety-minded as a "general term" referring to those in late Umayyad times (692-750) who, "expected Islam to carry with its own law, its own learning, its own etiquette, its own principles of private life and public order…" Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture Of Islam, Volume One,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) pp. 250-251. According to Hodgson these piety-minded would later be called ulamā' when they began to systematize these ideals and focus on *sharī'a* through *fiqh*, attempting to, "determine proper answers to questions of legal (and personal) practice" (p. (255). For a critique of Hodgson's categories see, Christoper Melchert, "The Piety of the Hadith Folk", (Int. J. Middle East Stud. **34** (2002), 425–439). Melchert claims that Hodgson did not give enough detail about what differentiated the later piety-minded (who became, for Hodgson, "sha'riah-minded") from other types of pious figures. For a history of the ulamā' also see Zaman, *The Ulamā' of Contemporary Islam*. In reference to the 'ulamā' position as law authorities see Liyakat Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006) Chapter 2.

syncretizing changed circumstances with theological understanding when possible.[4] Some classes of ‘ulamā’, especially the preachers, have also had the responsibility to directly convey these defenses and reformulations to the public by constantly reminding the people of their religious duties. Many ‘ulamā’ discourses have been perpetually responsive to present conditions, hence the content of the various ‘ulamā’ transmissions, whether they were meant for the general public or for other scholars, have always been open to a certain amount of diversification and modification. Although presently the ‘ulamā’ do not utilize all of their past discursive forms, the ‘ulamā’ in Egypt continue to use the medium of preaching as a means of instructing the public. Egyptian ‘ulamā’ preachers still interpret the Qur’an and ḥadīth to bring forth new responses, ones attuned to their particular environment.

The changes that took place during the modern[5] era were unprecedented in Islamic history; especially in the way that they opened the field of religious authority

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[4] Qasim Zaman says that the ‘ulamā’ have “constantly imagined, reconstructed, argued over, defended and modified” their discourse, see *The Ulamā’ of Contemporary Islam,* p. 10. For an explanation of how the legal scholars have allowed for adaptation see Wael Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[5] I will use the terms modernization, modern and modernity throughout the dissertation generally according to the definition of Ira Lapidus “ I use the term to refer the processes of centralization of state power and the development of commercialized or capitalist economies which entail the social and cultural changes we call modernity.” (“Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms,” Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, Vol. 40, No. 4, 1997, pp. 444-460, pp. 444-445.)
In addition Talal Asad’s definition give us more detail about the processes of modernization: “Modernization is a project-or rather a series of interlinked projects- that certain people in power seek to achieve. The project aims at institutionalizing a number of (sometimes conflicting, often evolving) principles…it employs proliferating technologies that generate new experiences of space and time…consumption and knowledge. The notion that these experiences constitute ‘disenchantment’- implying a direct access to reality, a stripping away of magic myth and the sacred- is a salient feature of the modern epoch.” Talal Asad *Formation of the Secular* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) p. 13,

beyond previously recognized boundaries. This limited the influence of the ‘ulamā’ and threatened their status as transmitters of knowledge. Even so, characterizing contemporary Islamic resurgence in Egypt in a way that discounts the importance of the ‘ulamā’’s current functioning as intermediaries does not present a full or accurate picture of contemporary religion there. Such a characterization relies on the false assumption that the ‘ulamā’ have completely lost their authority among the people.[6] Even though their role as intermediaries has been curtailed in recent times, the ‘ulamā’ remain influential guides. They have adapted by using their discourses to defend against instability and to reaffirm their status as transmitters of knowledge. They have also been able to invent new ways to ensure their unremitting relevance, even though sometimes to do so they have had to go beyond past methods of adjustment. If we ignore ‘ulamā’ continuance, how they still lead the populace and reaffirm their status, ensuring their role into the future, then we overlook an important account of how the Islamic religion has continued into the contemporary period in spite of the threats to its stability.

Furthermore, if we want to fully understand Islamic religious history in the 20th century we must examine the ways in which average people engaged, and were engaged

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For Arkoun modernization, “was experienced and implemented a continuous effort to ensure the independence of spheres, especially the religious, political, legislative, legal and judicial spheres, which remained unseparated in other civilizations. The result of the process of separating off religion as distinctively autonomous was the increasing subsumption of ‘beyond’ into ‘behind.’” Arkoun, *Islam, Modernism and the West*, p. 26

In Egypt in particular it also signifies a time of colonization and the imposition of outside European power structures. But when I speak of modernity in this dissertation I also understand that I am referring to one aspect: what was perceived as modernity by a member of the ‘ulamā’ in late twentieth century Egypt, and according to the conditions in which he lived.

[6] For a discussion of the literature on modern Islam that perpetuates these ideas see Zaman, *The ‘Ulamā’ of Contemporary Islam*, Introduction.

by, religion throughout this trying period, and how the ‘ulamā’ helped to direct this engagement. While I am not discounting the importance of Egyptian intellectuals and Islamists, most average folk look instead to the ‘ulamā’ for instruction on how integrate correct religious practice into daily activities. The survival of tradition can actually be detected in how believers continuously utilize religion in their lives. There has been a lot written about the importance of understanding Islam from below, defining religion not through the study of texts alone but by how religion is animated in the lives of practitioners.[7] However, studying the religion of the people, understanding how they embody their faith, also entails understanding how texts enable belief to be absorbed and then substantiated in the practicable. Those who aid the assimilation of revelatory knowledge often articulate the ease of blending textual understandings and practice. The ‘ulamā’, especially in their role as preachers, aid assimilation because they reconstruct the textual tradition as it comes to them, tailoring it to fit the particulars of their context. ‘Ulamā’ communications to the believing public then become the texts of suitability, which represent continuation and adaptation, or textual traditions melded with the present concerns of adherents.

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[7] See Ernest Gellner *Muslim Society*, (New York Cambridge University Press, 1983). Baoz Shoshan in *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), argues that one need not disregard texts to study popular culture. Also see Jonathan Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).and *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

The ‘ulamā’ in Sunni Islam also have a claim to religious authority,[8] which has enabled their communications to be continually efficacious. Many academics have divided authority in the Sunni community after Muḥammad’s death according to different spheres of influence including the political, the religious and the spiritual.[9] Within the religious sphere itself there are also different areas of expertise, all of them harkening back to the example of Muḥammad and some of them being associated with specific types of actors. They include, but are not limited to, access to the spiritual realms, legal knowledge, pious, exemplary behavior, and the claim to lineage.[10] For our purposes, what is important about these distinctive areas is how they compliment one another more

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[8] In relation to the ‘alim-preacher, for the purposes of the dissertation, I consider this authority to be: “In contrast to military and political authority, which is vested with powers to secure obedience…religious authority is a spiritually compelling person, book or tradition that so fundamentally affects or influences us that that we recognize in him or her or it a spiritual power which…’speaks to our condition’ and to which therefore we look for guidance.” Geddes MacGregor, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion,* “Authority”, Paragon House, New York, 1991, pp. 48

[9] Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam: From the Rise of Muḥammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads,* (New Brunswisk: Transaction Publishers, 1989) see chapter 5. For Dabashi political authority belonged to the Caliphs, religious authority to the ‘ulama’ and spiritual came eventually to belong to the Sufis. As I will show such a clear distinction often hides the fact that influential personages are associated with different types of authority. Also see Takim, The Heirs of the Prophet, especially chapter one where he gives extensive coverage to the Prophetic tradition, “The scholars are the heirs of the Prophet.” He also claims different realms of authority for he ‘ulama’ and the caliphs. In addition both Dabashi and Takim rely on Weber’s notion of the “routinization of charisma” to explain what happened to charismatic authority after Muḥammad and how it changed through its dissipation. Also see Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name*, (Oxford: One World Publications 2001) Chapter 2. He says that eventually, by the fourth/tenth century authority in Islam was given different voices, “political, communal, custom-based, tribal, economic, military, Sufi” as well as juristic. But he also argues that Muḥammad’s authority was deposited in Islamic law and that the jurists as interpreters of the law then came to be seen as authoritative. (p. 12)

[10] See Arthur Beuhler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet*, (Chaper Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), John Renard, *Friends of God*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), and Vincent Cornell, *The Realm of the Saint* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), which all represent the Sufi studies of authority. For the different models Muḥammad represents see AnneMarie Schimmel, *And Muḥammad is His Messenger*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985) chapter 2. Also see Takim *The Heirs of the Prophet*, Dabashi *Authority in Islam*, and Patrick Gaffney, *The Prophet’s Pulpit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) for Weber’s typology of the three types of authority: legal, traditional and charismatic, which I do not use because they are too limiting and would be inaccurate for my purposes.

than how they differ. All of them, or any combination of them, can appear in one religious figure by being melded to fit the primary function and goals of that particular individual. It is often those who successfully merge their capabilities who have the greatest appeal with the public. How 'ulama' preachers blend their capacities can depend upon the depths of their connection to religious learning or esoteric insight, their rapport with the people, their goals, and even the time period or region in which they live.

Preachers are the class of 'ulamā' who have had both the freedom to formulate novel authority, even beyond the recognized typology of characteristics associated with Muhammad, and the greatest access to the people. In their exhortations 'ulamā' preachers integrate their religious knowledge with the actualities of life, which can include popular manifestations of religion as well as elements of daily existence. They often formulate original programs based on these dual purposes: summoning the people to correct worship and belief and delivering messages that include currently familiar, if unconventional, reality. Often times the transmissions of 'ulamā' preachers reach beyond well-established boundaries of acceptable content. They have also been known to employ unique methods, in an attempt to ensure that their messages successfully reach the people.

In the modern era in Egypt preaching has been crucial to the continuance of 'ulamā' relevance, beyond being associated with the responsibility to bring correct religion to the people. Since the advent of modernity in Egypt, 'ulamā' functions have

been increasingly curtailed,[11] their responsibilities as guardians of the law, and the divine texts, were taken over by the Egyptian state. Secularization and the rise of the nation state also enabled those utilizing extra-religious types of authority to gain prominance within the realm of religious expertise. Preaching, however, remains one of the roles in which the ʻulamā' continue to assert their dominance, amongst this competition, as the correct purveyors of revelatory knowledge. Nevertheless, the ʻulamā' have had to expand the role of preaching, to both hold on to one of the few vocations left open to them, and to counter threats to their status as the exclusive transmitters of religious knowledge. So while the expansion of authority beyond the legal/textual was always possible for the ʻalim-preacher, in the modern era it became a necessity for many.

In order to maintain a voice amongst the people some Egyptian preachers, because of the changed atmosphere, have even supplemented their traditional expertise; often successfully delivering religious messages as part of social or political movements. This has helped them both compete in the realm of religious ideas and speak to a secularly educated, politically aware, public. Others rely on the categories of authority within the traditional typology, but supplement that with modern technologies and sensibilities, which also helps them reach larger audiences with their religious messages. Both examples illustrate the interdependence of various forms of authority in terms of the function of the ʻalim preacher.

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[11] On the curtailing of ʻulama' authority especially in the legal realm, see Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, chapter 2.

Although ‘ulamā’ influence is often assumed to be merely connected to their legal occupations as jurists and judges, this overlooks the ‘ulamā’ preachers’ other areas of dominance. As those who directly transmit religious knowledge to the general population, they must rely on categories of authority, which appeal to their public.[12] When amalgamations of exceptional characteristics, religious or secular, are recognized in any individual ‘alim, they provide the basis for various types of effective authority.[13] As I experienced in Cairo, many Egyptians have a clear sense of which characteristics should be manifested in religious guides, which enables them to sift through the proliferation of religious messages available for their consumption. Well-respected ‘ulama’, while they impart knowledge about proper behavior and worship, may also be heeded because they are associated with piety. When the knowledge they impart is visible in their lives it is a mark of the sincerity of their admonitions. Some trusted ‘ulamā’ preachers are also followed because they are known to receive special gifts from God (*karāmāt*), which signals an affirmation of their reliability, in addition to the veracity of their knowledge. This is because karāmāt is understood to be received as a result of ones faithfulness and dedication to God, hearkening back to pious behavior. In the

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[12] Khaled Abou El Fadl, focusing on the juristic role of the ‘ulama’ says: “The jurists had become the depositories of a literary-text based legitimacy.,.The Divine Will is embedded and perhaps concealed, in the texts and it is the function of the jurists to locate and explore that Will.” Fadl Speaking in God’s Name, p. 12.

[13] The way I will look at effective authority in this dissertation is a result of interviews I conducted in Cairo in 2006, 2007, and especially 2008. It was by hearing what people said about Shaykh Sha‘rāwī that I came to understand how his authority was manifested and perceived and therefore how it came to be effective. But I also became aware that other Egyptian ‘ulamā’ preachers, such as Muḥammad Al-Ghazālī (d. 1989) and Yusuf Qaradāwī, exercised religious authority by supplementing traditional types of authority with ones that were novel for ‘ulamā’ preachers. This difference will be explored throughout the dissertation.

modern era any and all of these can be supplemented by an ‘alim’s familiarity with the commonalities of his context, whether they be technological, scientific, or political.

In this dissertation we will examine the life and discourses of one such ‘alim–preacher, Muḥammad Mitwalli Sha‘rāwī (1911-1998). Sha‘rāwī was an al-Azhar trained ‘alim and he served as a representative of Al-Azhar in various capacities both formal and informal. He was best known for his weekly television program, which he started broadcasting in the 1970’s, called *nūr ‘alā nūr* (light upon light). During his program Sha‘rāwī would deliver his sermon, from a mosque somewhere in Cairo or Alexandria, sitting in front of his audience and interpreting the Qur’an for the Egyptian viewing public. His show aired every Friday afternoon after congregational prayer time when, as I was often told, people would rush home to watch Sha‘rāwī with their families. He was one of the first successful preachers on Egyptian television, hence he is often called the father of Islamic television preaching. His television show reached millions of Egyptians every week with his message of renewal, affirming the role of the ‘ulamā’ as guides of the people. In addition, with the influence and success of his show he pioneered a new avenue for the delivery for ‘ulamā’ preaching. Televised preaching also fit perfectly with life in the contemporary world and so it is one of the ways Sha‘rāwī helped integrate current reality with religious faith. He illustrated through his broadcasting, both in the utilization of media and in the content of his messages, how Egyptians could participate in twentieth century life without compromising the principles of adherence to Islam. By instructing his viewers on how to merge their particular

circumstances with Islamic belief and practice, Sha‘rāwī also attempted to subdue the effects of modernity by including contemporary issues and language into his articulations in order to increase religious adherence. Religious truth always took precedence for Sha‘rāwī, which meant that contingencies were always modified; weighed against his understanding of the Qur'an and ḥadīth, before they were accepted.

The example of Sha‘rāwī illustrates that ‘ulamā’ authority continues in Egypt and that, through preaching, their mediatory, articulated adaptations are still effectively conveyed to the people. Sha‘rāwī was an established ‘alim-preacher, and part of this vocation meant he served as an intermediary between God's words, as revealed in the Qur'an, and the people. It was also necessary that he articulate and distribute his revelatory knowledge effectively, making sure that it was relevant to his time. With the melding of these two purposes Sha‘rāwī illustrated his method of renewal, as he believed that revelation contained responses to every situation, and every knowledge claim, that manifests in history. Actually for Sha‘rāwī information was hidden in the Qur'an to be brought forth at the appropriate time, when the conditions of life necessitated it. He taught that only revelation could be trusted for certain knowledge about any subject, exoteric or esoteric, hence all other information must be weighed in the scales of revelation. Furthermore, Sha‘rāwī insisted that only the religious expert could interpret revelation in order to derive knowledge, therefore the religious expert was perpetually needed to decipher God's constant disclosures for the people. Sometimes, as a result of his theory of renewal, Sha‘rāwi accepted new conditions, and sometimes he modified, or

even rejected, them. Yet, a majority of his responses were attempts to syncretize religious knowledge and modern life: Sha‘rāwī either adapted new information to revelatory truth or he adjusted religious institutions and understandings according to novel circumstances as was necessitated for the survival of the tradition he represented.

Sha‘rāwī‘s attempts at syncretization and his ideas of renewal along how he helped ensure ‘ulamā’ relevance in the contemporary period through his popular preaching, will be considered throughout the dissertation. The next chapter begins with a review of the current literature on these subjects. Chapter 2 is concerned with Sha‘rāwī‘s life, as an example of both how he participated in the events of his time, and of how he derived authority from perceptions of his piety. Chapter 3 explains the basic components of Sha‘rāwī's method, including how these elements were appropriate to their time, by comparing Sha‘rāwī's method to that of his contemporaries. Chapter four and five will explore how, through his epistemology, Sha‘rāwī was able to establish the necessity of the ‘ulamā’, especially those who claimed both exoteric expertise and esoteric understanding. Chapter 6 will cover Sha‘rāwī's means of adaptation by looking at how he used both novel methods, and those typical for the preacher, to update his message and sometimes to alter the form of religious participation. It is my hope that this study will clarify how the ‘ulamā’ have survived and have even maintained a significant presence in Egypt throughout the modern period, ensuring their continuous influence into the future. I also hope to contribute to an understanding of contemporary Islamic religion

in Egypt by presenting how the challenges posed by modernity were adapted to the revelatory message through renewed interpretation, as a meaningful response.

Chapter One

Review of Literature on Islamic Preaching

➢ Introduction

Shaykh Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwi was a late twentieth century 'alim preacher, one who became well known throughout the Arab world for his televised sermons. The fact that as an 'alim preacher he became so famous signifies a shift in Islamic religious transmissions in the twentieth century, which was necessitated, and enabled, by the transformative effects of modernity. Television preaching is one example of the novel forms of adaptation that the 'ulamā' of Egypt have used to attempt to control the effects of these modern contingencies on religion. It is my contention that Egyptian 'ulamā' are still effective as authoritative guides because they have used the discourse of preaching to reinforce the tradition they represent and to attempt to control threats to it. Preaching is a time honored vocation for the 'ulamā' but it has also provided them with the flexibility they needed to modify their discourse for the purposes of transmitting religious knowledge to the modern believing public.

In this dissertation we will focus on how one particular 'alim preacher, Shaykh Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, used his sermons to put forth a program of renewal, responding to modern influences by melding past means of adaptation with novel devices to articulate the primacy of knowledge gained from the Qu'ran and ḥadīth. In doing so

he demonstrated his indispensability as an interpreter and communicator of that knowledge. His reformulation relied on reinforcing the tradition as much as it did on reconciling religious adherence with historical reality. He syncretized revelatory understanding and new conditions by modifying tradition and adapting or rejecting contingencies when necessary, applying revelation to the temporal.

The Sunni ‘ulamā’, because of their specialized training, have maintained their authority throughout Islamic history by claiming unique access to the revelation, which manifested in their responsibility to transmit knowledge to the believing public. But their authority has never been a coercive power. Instead, being “in authority” has meant that they, “obtain compliance with their commands by displaying the marks or insignia of authority that communicate to others that they are entitled to issue such a directive or command.” Hence, their authority does not force compliance on one who disagrees; it only renders personal judgment secondary to the commands of the recognized authority, the one who displays such marks.[14] According to this account, figures of authority rely on the perception people have of them to obtain compliance. Once compliance is obtained, and personal judgments become secondary. then authority becomes effective. The ‘ulamā’’s commission to lead the people in religion has usually been manifested in this way.

Part of the ‘ulamā’’s vocation has also been to use their discourses to prescribe ways that contingencies can be adapted to the revelation, either through rejection or

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[14] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name* (Oxford: One World Publications, 2001), pp. 18-19 and chapter 2 in general.

incorporation. Both types of responses were formulated within their interpretations of the divine texts and the divine law. But because in the twentieth century the ‘ulamā’ were forced to relinquish many of the avenues they had previously used to instruct the public; their attempts to decipher the temporally relevant in terms of the eternal were undermined. As their spheres of influence were reduced they began to concentrate on the roles that were left to them. In Egypt many ‘ulama’ focused on preaching and through preaching they were able to display their unique abilities, based on their specialized training, to interpret the revelation for the public, thereby demonstrating their indispensability.

Televised preaching has further assured this continuance by enabling ‘ulama’ preachers to perform their basic function as intermediaries and at the same time to compete in a diffuse market place of religious ideas. Sha‘rāwī in particular understood that television would allow his exhortations to reach a large audience with his message of renewal, which was part of the reason he agreed to use the medium. At the same time because his televised sermons were delivered to a massive public, they helped him combat threats to his authority by showing the necessity of the alim-preacher as mediator between the people and the revelation. Hence, he harnessed the established perceptions of the ‘ulamā’ as transmitters of the revelatory understanding they gained through their interpretations of the Qur’an and ḥadīth. He also demonstrated the necessity of the ‘ulamā’’s mediation in providing guidance for believers by rejecting contemporary knowledge when it contradicted the Qur’an and adapting it to the revelation when it did

not. As a result he helped ensure the long-term survival of foundational belief and practice.

It is through deciphering God's will for humanity and instructing the public on how to apply that will, ideally, to situations in life, that religious specialists guide believers. A binary struggle is often imagined between these two elements, the eternality of revelation and the temporality of human circumstances. But for religious adherents revelation must be applied to the temporal for its textual manifestations to become animated in their lives. This compliment, as expressed through the discourses of the 'ulamā', is the key to understanding how contingencies are subsumed by revelation, giving them their proper temporality, ideally keeping the revelation primary in every present moment.

Certain traditions of discourse within Islam have always functioned according to this description, such as the practice of law, the formation of legal edicts, and the institution of preaching. It is in the actual content of these discourses that one finds the workings of successful discursive practice because in the expositions of the 'ulamā' we discover how the structures of a tradition set forth boundaries, which enable contingencies to have a limited role in altering religious communication as a whole. In order to understand this process I will examine the Islamic discursive tradition[1] as the

[1] By "Islamic discursive tradition" I mean the forms of articulation that the 'ulamā' have previously and continually engaged in up until today. Although they have varied in different places and at different times, especially in the modern period, they have included articulations of scholars to other scholars, such as legal and theological texts and those of scholars to the people, including religious edicts (*fatāwa)*, and sermons.

means by which the 'ulama' have continued to substantiate the truth of the revelatory message through time and in various circumstances.

➢ **Discursive Practice**

Recently academics have suggested that there are ways of charting how Islamic tradition has interacted with modern influences and remained intact by incorporating or rejecting extraneous influences where necessary.[2] What does this process of interaction, incorporation or rejection, and continuation look like? How has Islam as a tradition been subtly altered while at the same time maintaining foundational practices in order to remain important in the lives of practitioners? It is the 'ulamā''s continued engagement with traditional Islamic discourse and its reception among historically situated Muslims that has ensured that past divinely inspired forms of religious communication have continued into the present context. These engagements, as the texts of continuation, represent the present interpretive moment. To trace how Islamic discourse has remained instructive, forward reaching, and of primary importance to practitioners by bridging the gap between divine language and human reality, these texts need to be explored.

Before this exploration can be undertaken, we must clarify what "religious discourse" and "discursive traditions" are. The first step is to understand that tradition, as Talal Asad has said, is not, "a passing on of an unchanging substance through homogenous time." Instead:

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[2] See Talal, Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2003) and Armando Salvatore, *The Public Sphere: Liberal Modernity, Catholicism, Islam,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2007).

> " In tradition the 'present' is always at the center. If we attend to the way time present is separated from but also included within events and epochs, the way time past authoritatively constitutes present practices, and the way authenticating practices invoke or distance themselves from the past (by reiterating, reinterpreting and reconnecting textualized memory and memorialized history), we move toward a richer understanding of tradition's temporality."[3]

Asad helps account for the way present time is included yet distanced from the past through behavior that relies, either through invocation or detachment, on past authenticated traditions of practice. To understand the present moment of tradition we must understand how tradition has been removed from, and has incorporated, certain aspects of the past especially in terms of the authoritative. This is a dynamic process of interaction between time, event (practice), practitioner and authority. In addition views of the temporal connectedness of tradition must be grounded in something besides texts, religious tradition presently continues through practice and experience. For Asad the present is always at the center of tradition because of what believers do with it:

> "After all religion consists not only of particular ideas, attitudes and practices, but of followers. To discover how these followers instantiate, repeat, alter, adapt, argue over, and diversify them (to trace their tradition) must surely be a major task."[4]

Tracing tradition, for Asad, is tracing not just the theory of religion or even the practice itself but how the practitioners relate to these aspects. What constitutes a lived tradition is how its resources are utilized, enhanced or disregarded or, even more importantly, reformulated to accept adaptation at any particular moment. As an

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[3] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular,* p. 222.
[4] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, p. 193.

anthropologist Asad is of course emphasizing practitioners above ideas and even the practices themselves. But this interest in the adherent also firmly fixes his study in a particular moment of religion and on the way believers "instantiate, repeat, alter, adapt argue over and diversify" ideas, attitudes and practices, at that moment.

If we want to chart the movement of tradition in contemporary Islam, however, we must study religious texts and how Muslims are interacting with them within the reality of the contemporary world and how that interaction has repeated or altered practice and attitudes. When asking what aspects of Islam are being emphasized for the present and the future, and which disregarded, we are seeking an answer that must consider the role of the 'ulamā''s discursive texts. These texts include articulations concerned with the broader normative aspects and those whose messages will need to be regarded as adaptive, introducing novel configurations of discourse while leaving intact the elements necessary for recognizable continuance. Tradition in that sense is not bound by time; it is always present yet in a state of flux due to communicative interaction with contemporary events and with other times. But, in considering the lives of believers, their current state of embodying the texts, the religious arbiter can adaptively shape the discourse to make it suitable for the public. Adaptations help arbiters effectively advise, correct and guide within the present context.

How do traditions remain stable through time if followers and arbiters are constantly engaging them, sometimes even altering them? According to Armando Salvatore, traditions remain viable because they have in place the authoritative means of

engaging in debate by adhering to, or leaving behind, past discursive practices as necessary whenever they face challenges. The official institutions of tradition can control the effects of such challenges through communication by mediating between threats and the believing public. The discursive aspects of traditions thus have the internal authoritative means in place to engage in debate and the most common way they do so is through language.

> "Macrotraditions"… provide broad frameworks of narrative identification and instruction and are therefore like arenas for intersecting language games. Practice, on the other hand, is more directly determined by the "microtraditions" providing instructions as to how to live a good life with regard to a particular role, or indeed a multiplicity of roles….Where can we locate a strong link between micro and macrotraditions?…This link can be seen in the use of discourse and its modes of argument and reasoning in order to transcend, via creativity and criticism, the limitations of the interpretations and definitions of the goods and the solutions to problems thus far delivered within a given tradition. Solutions are envisioned by referring means to ends or goods…A tradition cannot escape conflict but has to accept and process it conveniently as essential to its survival.[5]

Traditions and their institutions are subtly transformed through this process. Transformation occurs because the discourse associated with religious traditions has a twofold nature: it is both shaped and controlled by the tradition and it is in constant flux because of the ever-changing needs of its members. If we understand the relationship between the means used by agents of traditions to articulate and respond to changing needs and how that response revises religious discourse we can begin to understand the diversity of traditions, both diachronically and synchronically.[6] What I want to

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[5] Armando Salvatore, *The Public Sphere*, pp. 80-81.
[6] Armando Salvatore, *The Public Sphere*, pp. 207-220.

emphasize here is not only the connection between practice and the "broad frameworks" of religion through discourse, but that certain elements endure while others are open to change, even though as time goes on some of the previously persistent elements can be called into question. Therefore it is not always easy to identify accurately which elements of the discourse persist over time, and which do not. Yet, we can look at specific historical instances of interaction and see clearly that in time and through time arbiters of tradition are able to adjust to disruption by expanding their messages to restrain potential threats.

Salvatore also claims that the agent of the tradition uses internal means, which change over the course of time, to introduce new elements into the discourse. But while discourse needs an organized authority in place because it cannot be reduced to rational procedures, it must also include the participation of its members. For Salvatore, "prophetic discourse" is the:

> "Matrix of successive waves of socio-religious movements that do not simply provide a collective identity, but also the necessary coordination among its members in the task to match the 'common sense' ordinary practices with the values, virtues and goods promoted by a discursive tradition."[15]

Hence, the transformation of discourse does not just rely on the specialists of religion but must also be acted upon by practitioners and incorporated into their daily lives. However this relationship does not mean that only the context and situation matter; it is quite the opposite. For Salvatore discourse mediates between institutions and the

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[15] Armando Salvatore, *The Public Sphere*, p. 63.

public as "densely complex instances of language use."[16] In order to understand how religion becomes effective in certain situations, one has first to know the "repertoires of engagement enabled by the forms of the tradition, that is the forms of life and language games invested into the situation by the agents."[17]

As agents of tradition, the 'ulamā' develop "repertoires of engagement" which are delivered to the people in the sermons of the preachers. These sermons serve to reinforce the essentials of the tradition by reconciling accidentals to primary purposes, such as the worshipping of God and salvation. When the scholars of the people (*'ulama al-sha'bi*) convey these discourses they offer believers the means to adapt their lives to these primary purposes by elucidating which aspects of adaptation are acceptable and which need correction through guidance and instruction. In addition in times of crisis when these primary purposes are threatened, as in the modern era, the need for 'ulamā' preachers to subsume potentially threatening contingencies under interpretations of the divine revelation becomes urgent and requires original, appropriate responses.

'Ulamā' participation in discursive communication serves as a means of temporarily stabilizing the imbalance that often occurs in discreet moments of ongoing traditions. In the case of preaching, by teaching believers how to live their present lives according to God's intentions, preachers can elevate the purposes of the tradition above potentially destabilizing elements. At the same time they are also articulating how their participation in this particular function is necessary to the wellbeing of the lives of believers because

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[16] Armando Salvatore, *The Public Sphere*, pp. 84-85.
[17] Armando Salvatore, *The Public Sphere,* pp. 74-78.

their discourse helps ensure the survival of the tradition.[6] The success of these articulations lies in the authority and ability of the arbiter who formulates and delivers them. Yet, it is also true that in order to guarantee the perpetuation of tradition, the communication that is conveyed by the 'ulama' to the people needs to engage them. This means that it has to be understandable, appropriate, but even more importantly accepted as accurate, in order to become beneficial to practitioners and to the tradition as a whole. While in the modern period this authority was opened to variation, within and outside of the 'ulamā' ranks, elements of uninterrupted 'ulamā' authority can still be recognized as one example of stability.

➢ Discourse and the Contemporary 'Ulamā'

To help distinguish and identify the discourses of the 'ulamā' from other expressions, Qasim Zaman argues that:

> "While the 'ulamā''s position and roles previously differ in different Muslim societies, they are often recognizable, and distinguishable, from others, in terms not just of their intellectual formation and their vocation, but also for their mode of argumentation-a style whose distinctiveness and authority typically rests on its discursive engagement with the history of early scholarly debates."[18]

It is not by claiming that the 'ulamā' present a monolithic voice or by looking at instances of agreement in their ideas and rulings that we can pinpoint their discursive practice. It is instead by examining their argumentative style, which includes their ability to utilize past

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[18] Qasim Zaman, "Consensus and Religious Authority in Modern Islam : The Discourses of the' Ulamā'", in *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, edited by Gudrun Kramer and Sabine Schmidtke, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 154.

authoritative sources in the present, that we can identify them as ‘ulamā’. The ‘ulamā’’s ability to engage with the past has made their discourse distinctive throughout time, because it relies on their knowledge and specialized training. ‘Ulamā’ expertise in the religious sciences, in turn, signals to the people that they can engage with the revelation and with the secondary texts, which helps their authority become effective. We can also identify the ‘ulamā’ among the proliferation of other voices in the modern world even though sometimes they, and their discourses, may overlap with “modernists” and “Islamists.” I will emphasize that it is these three elements; the ‘ulamā’’s authority as displayed in their discursive role and style of argumentation, their specialized training, and their particular vocations, which signal the distinctiveness of their capacity to transmit religious knowledge. But it is also important to recognize the historical moment, especially for the ‘ulama’ situated in the modern era, because this was a time when all three of these elements were drastically reformulated.

Additionally, the ‘ulamā’’s authoritative modes of argumentation when they are preaching to the people (therefore taking into account a particular function), varies slightly from the picture Zaman presents, especially in the modern era. The vital importance of more than just their engagement with past scholarly debates must be emphasized. Many of the roles which have in the past connected the ‘ulamā’ to these debates have been overridden. The changed atmosphere in which the ‘ulamā’ in Egypt work has meant that they rely on their capacities as preacher-guides, often delivering sermons independent of government employ, as members of an official ‘ulamā’ class. These scholars of the people

emphasize their direct access to the revelatory texts, bypassing the need for engaging past scholarly debates. So while their style of argumentation is still distinctive, their connection to the extra-revelatory past is not as evident. It is not that they do not engage the scholarly debates- they do, even in their role as ‘ulama’ preachers. Instead, this involvement is not often referred to and therefore not an easily recognized part of their claim to authority in the modern context.

Therefore, while the authority of the ‘ulamā’’s argumentation among the people still rests on their access to the knowledge they claim to gain directly from the Qur’an and ḥadīth, based on their specialized training, it is not usually articulated today as more than that. This reticence to cite earlier scholarly sources is partly due to the fact that the religious scholars of the people don’t usually include these past arguments in their sermons; it is not an appropriate part of the admonitions delivered directly to the people for the purposes of edification. But this shift is also attributable to the fact that the accuracy and usefulness of past scholarly texts has been called into question by modernists, governments, and Islamists alike. These criticisms have resulted in a tendency to bypass authoritative, secondary texts and instead urge believers to return to the Qur’an and ḥadīth for direct guidance. As a result there is a new, modern, stress on personal interpretation.

Even though this trend appears to imperil ‘ulamā’ authority (if direct access to the revelation is encouraged why would the public need the ‘ulamā’?), they engage more and more in this novel interpretive emphasis, utilizing the revelation in new ways and relying less on the discourses of the past. Thus they have accentuated their own renewed

interpretations of the Qur'an and ḥadīth, but not those of the public in general, enabling them to remain relevant in the modern era despite the diffusion and dissipation of religious authority. But it is also important to keep in mind that by definition, programs of 'ulama' renewal have always called for returning to the divine revelation in order to formulate proper responses to historical contingencies. As we will also see the call for renewal based solely on primary texts, a trend believed to have begun in the modern period, actually began at least a century earlier. In the modern period the 'ulamā' in Egypt have balanced both the tradition of renewal with its particularly modern manifestations.

➢ Tajdīd-Renewal

Ideas about renewal (*tajdīd*) in Islam are usually traced back to a saying of Muhammad recorded in the ḥadīth collection of Abu Da'ud which states that at the beginning of every century God will send someone to renew religion.[19] Many influential Muslim legal thinkers and theologians have been considered the renewers (*mujaddid*, p. *mujaddidūn*) of their century including Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī (1058-1111). Renewal always carried with it the sense of purification through the reinforcement of Islamic faith and practice because the community of Muslims (*umma*) was expected to stray from the

[19] This ḥadīth is recorded and translated in many sources, see for example the article entitled "*Tadjdid* " in The Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition and Ella Landau-Tasseron "Cyclical Reform: A Study of the Mujaddid Tradition", Source: Studia Islamica, No. 70 (1989), pp. 79, John Voll, "Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: Tajdid and Islah," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, edited by John Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 33.

basic teaching of Islam over time.[20] The renewer of any era was supposed to help the Muslim community refocus on God's will for humanity by redirecting the community away from human failings. But renewers were charged with helping humanity institute an already "perfect" system as put forth in Qur'an and Sunna, not to introduce a new program. The trend towards looking to the texts to discover the ideal in any era, according to John Voll, usually kept renewal focused on "scriptualism"[21] or perhaps more accurately, kept it discursive. Therefore renewal has often been focused on adapting or defending against threats by offering new interpretations of the divine revelation, a job reserved exclusively for the 'ulama' before the modern era.

Tajdīd, as a presence throughout Islamic religious history, has also been described as "an authentic part of the working out of the Islamic revelation in history," a definition which recognizes the historical present as well as the influence of past movements on the present.[22] Revivalism as a pattern has also been used as a way to protest against the existing order, again signifying its beginnings in historical occurrences.[23] Tajdīd is

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[20] As'ad Abu Khalil, "Revival and Renewal," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, edited by John Esposito (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 431.

[21] John Voll, "Renewal and Reform in Islamic History," p. 35.

[22] Voll claims the continuity of *tajdīd* in Islam can be seen through three trends "1) the call for a return to, or a strict application of, the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet; 2) the assertion of the right of independent analysis *ijtihād* of the Qur'an and Sunna in this application…and 3)the reaffirmation of the authenticity and uniqueness of the Quranic experience…" ("Renewal and Reform in Islamic History," pp. 34-36). This third aspect according to Voll involves distinguishing between what is authentically Islamic and what has been adopted from elsewhere and a question of how cultural synthesis can take place without undermining the Islamic revelatory message, p. 41. (More on this in Chapter 3)

[23] See Nehemia Levtzion and John Voll eds. *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform In Islam* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), pp. 3-5. Also see John Voll "Revivalism and Social Transformations in Islamic History" in Muslim World, Volume 76, no. 3-4, pp. 170-172, where he states: "The 'crisis hypothesis' tends to postulate a contradiction between Islam and modernity which produces a crisis. The 'challenge perspective' sees Islam as a worldview which can function in the modern world. The crisis is not

especially prevalent in times of crisis as these are times of threat to existing institutions, which necessitates reformulation for the sake of long term survival. It was the responsibility of those 'ulamā' who possessed substantial, extraordinary knowledge of the revelatory texts, through study of the Arabic and through study of past authoritative interpretations, to put forth these reformulations.

For this reason the title of renewer (*mujaddid*) was applied to scholars who had made an impact on their community in their time, as recognized by those closest to them. Because renewers were identified as such by their circle of disciples and then confirmed by other, usually affiliated 'ulamā', being called a renewer came to be considered an honorific title. This gave rise to disputes, especially after the first few centuries of Islam, over who the renewer of each century actually was, and as a result no official apparatus was ever established for defining and identifying renewers. In contrast, the tradition of *ijtihād* (applying independent judgment in a legal or theological issue), recognized as closely related to tajdīd, was well developed and specific rules had to be followed if an 'alim wanted to claim the right to ijtihād.[24] Like renewers, those capable of performing ijtihād appeared occasionally throughout Islamic history and, "moved either by ambition or by objection to recognized doctrines, returned to the meaning of ijtihād (as) asserting

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that Islam can not survive in the modern world but that it needs to and can respond to the crises and challenges it faces."

[24]As'ad Abu Khalil. "Revival and Renewal" p. 431 and Ella Landau-Tasseron, "The 'Cyclical Reform': A Study of the Mujaddid Tradition," Studia Islamica, No. 70 (1989), pp. 87-90. For explanation of the requirements of a *mujtahid (*one who performs ijtihād) see The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, "*Ijtihad"*, by Wael Hallaq, 1995, p. 179-180. He also discusses how in the beginning of the 11th century different *mujtahids* were classified, p. 180. As for the complexity of the task of the mujtahīd see Bernard Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 1998). p. 209-210.

the right to form (ones) own opinion from first principles."[25] Still ijtihād and tajdīd were considered interdependent because in order for a renewers to put forth a new program every century they needed to issue new opinions. This meant that in practice renewers had to be as highly trained as those issuing recognized independent judgments in law and theology, but also that they depended on their influence within their communities and not just on the scholarly debates. Actually since those able to perform ijtihād and those who were considered by their disciples and peers as the renewers of their age were both of the highest caliber of 'ulama' they carried a great amount of authoritative stature as the representatives of a stable system of change, especially in pre-modern times.

➢ Renewal Through Ijtihād in Pre-modern Times

Although the traditions of tajdīd and ijtihād have been present in Islamic history since the earliest times, some academics believe that they were transformed in the 18th century by the influence of certain scholars who called for a strict return to the sources.[26]

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[25]D.B.MacDonald, "Idjithad," Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition, Brill, 2006. Ijtihād was connected specifically to independent judgments in regards to the law. In the context of Sunni Islamic law there has been much discussion about whether ijtihād in juristic usage continued after the establishment of the four Sunni schools of law or whether taqlīd (imitation) became the norm by which only the imitation of juristic reasoning could occur, this referring to the so called "closing of the gates of ijtihād" The most famous proponent of such a view was J Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1982). But recent scholarship has shed light on the fact that not only did ijtihād continue among Islamic jurists For a discussion of the history of ijtihad within the context of Sunni Islamic law see Wael Hallaq, "Were the Gates of Ijtihād Closed?" International Journal of Middle East Studies 16(1984), pp. 3-41. Also See Sherman Jackson, *Islamic Law and the State : The Constitutional Jurisprudence of Shih¯ab al-D¯in al-Qar¯af¯i,* 1996, and Bernard Weiss, "Interpretation in Islamic Law: The Theory of Ijtihad," The American Journal of Comparative Law, Vol. 26, No. 2,(Spring, 1978), pp. 199-212.

[26] See John Voll, "Revivalism and Social Transformations in Islamic History." in Muslim World, Volume 76, no. 3-4, pp. 170-195. Levtzion and Voll eds. *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform In Islam* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), Introduction, pp. 3-20, and Ira Lapidus "Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40, no. 4 (1997): pp. 120-125.

These "traditional reformers" (among them Shah Wali Allah al-Dihwali d. 1762) called for renewal through ijtihād and considered it heretical if qualified jurists did not practice independent reasoning and instead relied on imitating past legal rulings (*taqlīd)*.[27] Some academics have postulated that the men who studied with these scholars in the Haramayn (Mecca and Medina) then went back to their home countries to teach the revivalist thought they learned, emphasizing the importance of gaining knowledge directly from the revelatory sources, especially the ḥadīth. Thus these revivalists spread a distinct and consistent message of revival throughout the Muslim world.[28]

Ahmed Dallal however disputes this thesis, claiming instead that although there were influential teachers in the Haramayn and that many of the reformers of the pre-modern era did study with them, when one actually analyzes the various discourses of the reformers who called for renewal a great difference can be found between them. Dallal advocates looking to the content of the revivalist messages in its particularities to see how it was geared towards the situation of the reformer.[29] Dallal's idea of looking to the discourses of reformers to decipher the content and the individuality of each reformer will be utilized throughout the dissertation.

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[27] (Hallaq, 1995, Encyclopedia, p. 180).
[28] See Ahmad Dallal, "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850" Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 113, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1993), pp. 341-342, Leztzion and Voll *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform,* especially the introduction and also Louis Brenner's and John Voll's essays in the volume. For ideas about how common learning circles produced particular types of reform movements in the 18th century see: John O. Voll, "Muhammad Hayya al-Sindi and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab: An Analysis of an Intellectual Group in Eighteenth-Century Madina," BSOAS 38.1 (1974) and John Voll, "Ḥadīth Scholars and Tariqahs: An 'Ulama' Group in the 18th Century Haramayn and their Impact in the Islamic World," Journal of Asian and African Studies 15.3-4 (1980);
[29] Dallal-1993-pp. 341-359.

Nonetheless, as Bashir M. Nafi has shown, the reformist ‘ulamā’ in pre-modern period, especially the Sunni ‘ulamā’ who studied in the Haramayn, did share some common features. These ‘ulamā’ considered themselves Sufis and they were concerned with the study of ḥadīth. The combination of Sufism and the emphasis on ḥadīth, a revelatory source in Islam, came together to produce a new, more unifying approach to the question of revival. Instead of using the sources and the practice of Sufism to divide the community, these ‘ulamā’ highlighted unification through new ḥadīth interpretations and the rejection of controversial Sufi practice. Nafi identifies three common features of these ulama to show how a new emphasis on unity through a return to the revelatory sources affected their outlook. First was the fact that they came from different Sunni legal schools (*maḍāhib*,) which indicates a move towards the deemphasizing of *maḍhab* affiliation in favor of searching the Qur’an and ḥadīth directly for legal guidance. Also, as a whole these reformers began to question the doctrines of Asharite theology, focusing instead on the Qur’an and ḥadīth and less on doctrinal faithfulness. Finally, although many of these ‘ulama’ were affiliated with particular Sufi orders (*ṭarīqa, turūq)* the trend was moving more towards a “cultural affiliation” with Sufism and away from strict adherence to the rules of one particular order.[30]

Within any one movement of renewal common aspects will exist if in fact its members are inspired by common sources, or common contingencies. But at the same time different individuals within one movement, when they inhabit different contexts,

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[30] Basheer M. Nafi, “Tasawwuf and Reform in Pre-Modern Islamic Culture: In Search of Ibrahim al-Karin,” Die Welt des Islams, New Series, Vol. 42, Issue 3, pp. 309-351.

need to formulate their own programs to solidify and teach their ideas of renewal to others. Both similarities and differences can be detected in the discourse of renewers, because most of them use textual foundations to combat threats to the primacy of those texts or to other stable long-term elements of tradition. Therefore they also designate how in any given moment certain elements of tradition can be reformulated in order to attempt the reinforcement of the essentials of tradition. Yet the choice of which stable elements need reinforcing and which can be reformulated for this purpose will vary according to the historical circumstances, because these circumstances are usually what motivate discourses of renewal. In the case of reform in the pre-modern period the Qur'an and ḥadīth remained stable, a special emphasis in this case was placed on the ḥadīth, and what was modified were the elements of the tradition that appeared to divide the community as a whole, such as belonging to a particular school of law. The concern of the Haramayn 'ulamā' and their disciples was unity, and through their program of renewal they hoped to reinforce the sense of unity in the ummah based on the threats to the stability of the tradition at this particular moment in history.

It would however be a mistake to look at trends in the history of revivalist movements without taking into account how the tradition of communication involved in renewal has been instrumental in adapting historical reality in the attempt to fortify core values. Examining how the agents of tradition use language for this purpose pinpoints the differences in individual reformers diachronically and synchronically. It can help us

distinguish both larger programs of renewal as responses to particular historical circumstances and common trends in the history of revivalist movements.

Academics have tended to emphasize the first aspect while ignoring the second. For example they have characterized the difference between pre-modern and modern reform in Islam by stating that pre-modern reform focuses on internal causes and needs, while modern reform responds to external causes.[31] This is an oversimplification. Many of the trends and concerns of pre-modern renewal were continued into the modern era. It is clear that the trends of eighteenth century reform- strict focus on primary texts, rejection of texts and affiliations that can lead to division of the ummah, and the reformulation of what it means to be a Sufi- all had a lasting effect. These trends have continued into the 19th and 20th centuries, branching out to form the basis of many different programs of renewal and reform.[32] What connects certain modern ‘ulama’

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[31] See M.A. Zaki Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt*, (London: Croom Helm, 1978) in which he states that although the community of Muslims does from time to time have revivalist movements what characterizes the modern revivalists is that they, “focused most of their effort on exorcising the pernicious influence of modern civilization.” Part of the problem of his characterization is his need to separate out “revivalists” from “conservatives,” Many ulamā’ in fact called for renewal in the modern era as, according to the history of tajdīd, they were meant to be. The problem with these categories is that they do not take into account the specific content of the rhetoric or discourse of those who claim to be revivalists or renewers. (1 pp. 13-16). For a different perspective see Ahmad Dallal, “The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1993): pp. 341-359.

[32]Here I distinguish between renewal, a role previously (and for the purposes of this dissertation currently) reserved for the ‘ulamā’, which focuses on the need for purification when the community has gone astray, and reform, which is now open to many different types of actors and more generally refers to a call to update Islamic beliefs and practices (and is often associated with modernists like Muhammad ‘Abduh). I will follow the lead of As‘ad Abu Khalil and use revival to mean “strengthening the spiritual dimension of faith and practice” which he claims can be seen even in the writing of Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī. (“Revival and Renewal, pp. 431). Even with this distinction As‘ad, like many academics, uses these terms interchangeably. John Voll categorizes movement such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which are essentially intellectualist revivalist movements, as belonging to the tradition of *tajdid* (“Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam,” pp. 40-44). In order to look at 20th century revival movements from within the tajdīd tradition Ira Lapidus characterizes the revival movements of the 20th century by stating that: “The

renewers to a past engagement with the idea of renewal is not only a focus on bringing people back to the "straight path" but also how and why they should do so. They have focused on the eternal sources of the religion, the Qu'ran and ḥadīth, as well as the need for new interpretations according to the needs of the community, enabling believers to live their lives according to the will of God. When seen in light of the history of tajdīd this approach of 20th century 'ulamā' in fact continues a past role. Their programs do not need to be rejectionist because they still rely on many of the past traditions. The full extent of their programs can only be gleaned by examining the content of present 'ulamā' discourse in the context of their particular time to see how they harness the revelation by relying on their capacities as interpreters.

It is not the case that the 'ulamā' have put forth a monolithic call for revival; actually the opposite is true. Because modern 'ulamā' have faced an unprecedented situation they have often responded in novel ways that effectively intensify the differences between their calls. Studying programs of reform and renewal in the modern

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basic tenet of these movements is that the salvation of Islamic societies lies in a return by each and every individual to the morality taught in the Qur'an and the Sunna, the teachings of the Prophet. They call, at least in theory, for a return to the sharī'a, or Islamic law. They call for a stripping away of many of the traditional practices and beliefs of Muslims as a false historical accretion to the pure Islam. They call for a renewed commitment to Islam in the hearts and minds of individuals as the basis of communal solidarity, social justice, and the fair treatment of the poor. They want women to return to family roles. They want to remove corrupt regimes and create Islamic states to be the protectors and enforcers of Islamic morality in Islamized societies. (Ira M. Lapidus, "Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms," Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1997), pp. 444-460)This definition enables the inclusion of too many groups who, when looking at the tradition of tajdīd, do not always meet the requirements set forth by the tradition itself. Neither Voll nor Lapidus takes into consideration, the fact of the 'ulamā' claim to knowledge, which results in the distinctiveness of their discourse. While it is true that all three categories are associated with one or more well known 'alim, the distinction in the programs themselves should be kept clearly delineated if their differences are to be maintained. In the modern era it is not necessary to define the terms by the actors except in the case of renewal, given that as a theory it is historical attached to the 'ulamā' in the ways that I have explained.

period also offers us a unique opportunity because we have greater access to the historical record, and to those who are living witnesses, resulting in a more complete picture of the contingencies surrounding these various programs.

➢ Modern ‘Ulamā’ and Calls for Reform

Consciously disregarding secondary texts, scholarly debate and past formulated opinions, in favor of personal interpretation of the primary sources is generally seen as a trend begun in the modern era by Muhammad ‘Abduh ((1849-1905) in Egypt.[33] We see that historically it had precursors in the pre-modern period of Islamic history. What made ‘Abduh different however was his stress that new, direct interpretations of the Qur’an should be based on reason. ‘Abduh did not want to use reason to legitimize all European innovation, instead he wanted to sift through the new ideas and realities brought from Europe and discern which were compatible with Islam, in order to strengthen Egyptian society and reinvigorate its morality.[34]

‘Abduh’s focus on renewal as a way to respond to European influence, demonstrates that his project was conceived according to the peculiarity of his historical

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[33] For studies on projects of ‘ulamā’ renewal begun in other places in the Middle East and North Africa at the same time see David Commons, *Islamic Reform, Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and “Social Criticism and Reformist Ulama of Damascus” Studia Islamica, No. 78 (1993), pp. 169-180, Mahmoud Yazbak. “Nablusi Ulama in the Late Ottoman Period, 1864-1916,” International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (29) 1997, p. 27-47. These authors argue that programs similar to ‘Abduh’s in Egypt were attempted by ‘ulama’ in other regions. These were programs calling for social reform that were open to modernity. For a look at Ottoman reform and the ‘ulamā’ especially as it affected Ottoman attempts at reform in the nineteenth century see Butrus Abu Manneh, *Studies on Islam in the Ottoman Empire in the 19th Century,* Isis Press, Istanbul, (2001) and Heyd, Uriel, “The Ottoman Ulema and Westernization in the Time of Selim III and Mahmud II” in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization, volume IX,* (1961).

[34] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, (New York:* Cambridge University Press 1983), pp. 133-137.

context. Albert Hourani traces, in stages, the impact of European thought on the Arab world during what he called the "modern age." The first stage lasted from 1830-1870 and the second from 1870-1900. It was during this second period, with the expansion of Europe through colonization, that Arab writers saw Europe as both a model to be emulated and as an 'adversary.' These writers were not trying to convince the public that they needed to accept change, "but to convince those formed in a new mould that they could still hold on to something from their own past."[35] Their goal was essentially to "reinterpret Islam" to make it not only compatible with living in the modern world, but also to make it "a source of strength" in the modern life of the believer. Muhammad 'Abduh was the significant personage of this period.

'Abduh accepted the presence of modern institutions and thoughts, he did not try to resist or struggle against them, which is one of the reasons he has been labeled a modernist. What he was most concerned about was to show how "someone who lived in the modern world could still be a devout Muslim."[36] Because of the necessity of framing the question in this new way, Abduh advocated returning to the first sources and the example of the earliest generations of Muslims.[37] Abduh called for Muslims to:

> "liberate thought from the shackles of *taqlid*, and to understand religion as it was understood by the elders of the community before dissention appeared; to

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[35] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. vi.
[36] Hourani, *Arabic Thought,* p. 139
[37] Movements inspired by such calls are today called *salifiyya*. But this term is also often used to describe movements, like that of the *Wahabbi*s, who understand the term less as Abduh did and more as his disciple Rashīd Riḍā did. Riḍā who saw the pious ancestors as the first generation of Muslims. According to Hourani, "When 'Abduh talked of the salaf, he meant in a general way the creators of the central tradition of Muslim thought and devotion, from the Prophet to al-Ghazali." But it is hard to see this in the quote above because he calls for a return before dissention, which could also easily be interpreted as the first generation of Muslims. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought,* p. 229.)

> return, in the acquisition of religious knowledge, to its first sources, and to weigh them in the scales of human reason, which God has created in order to prevent excess or adulteration in religion, so that God's wisdom may be fulfilled and the order of the human word preserved, and to prove this religion must be accounted a friend to science, pushing man to investigate the secrets of existence, summoning him to respect established truths, and to depend on his moral life and conduct."[38]

'Abduh sought purity in the emulation of the earliest Muslims, and in weighing revelation with human reason to discover the secrets of existence. Thereby bequeathing two tools to those who followed him: Islam's earliest sources and human reason. His answer to the question of how to reconcile modern innovation and Islam placed emphasis on rationality.[39] Although 'Abduh advocated for revelation to be interpreted by reason he always called for reason to be bound to the precepts of the revelation, giving primacy to revelation.[40] Still, for the task of reform, rationality was the key. While this does not seem like much of a shift from those who came before him, it differs from pre-modern reformulations in one crucial way; it values individual capabilities over authoritative discourse. An emphasis on reason levels the playing field and opens the discourse of interpretation to anyone capable of reasoning. This has had a direct effect on the 'ulamā''s claim to possess special access to Quranic knowledge because of their training. It is not that before 'Abduh's time individuals did not seek guidance directly from the

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[38] Translated by Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought,* pp. 140-141.

[39] Abduh started from the question "'Why are the Muslim countries backward in every aspect of civilization?' and answered it in terms of the essential connection, in Islam although not necessarily in other religions, between religious truth and worldly prosperity. The teachings and moral precepts of Islam are such that, if they are properly understood and fully obeyed, they will lead to success in this world as well as the next-and to success in all the forms in which the world understands it, strength, respect, civilization, happiness." Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 228.

[40] Zaki Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt,* claims that: "Although Abduh attempted to revive Muslim philosophy, he had always shown a distaste for philosophical encroachment on the domain of religion (p. 50).

Qu'ran (or that they were not encouraged to do so) they did. It is a question of what became authoritative for the community as a whole, because it is that authority which represents the stability of tradition and therefore its continuance. In changing the discourse concerning authoritative hermeneutics, 'Abduh allowed the call for reform to go beyond previously recognized boundaries. Many groups were then able carry their projects beyond 'ulamā' limitations, such as those imposed by the traditions of renewal and independent reasoning.[41]

According to Hourani's timeline, the third period of European influence on the Arab world lasted from 1900-1939, and it was during this time that Abduh's legacy split into two distinct strains of thought, which are still manifest today. The first is comprised of those who think Islam should be the basis of society (today called Islamists and fundamentalists) and the second of those who think of Islam as precepts to be used for guidance, but that secular forces should rule society (today called modernists or liberal

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[41] For Wael Halllaq the ijtihād of reformers is not the same ijtihād of the past: "if it can indeed be so called ijtihād -it remains without methodological and philosophical foundation...their reinterpretation is still based on expediency, without due consideration of the intellectual integrity and systematic consistency of the law. They have set aside the traditional legal methodology, but they have not, at the same time, attempted to fashion a new methodology, one that sustains the present and future need for legal change." (Wael Hallaq, "Ijtihad." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World.* What Ed. 1995. Press, p.181) In contrast to meaning thoughtful, methodologically sound opinion the term ijtihād has come to mean a direct reinterpretation of the sources by either the qualified or the unqualified and not necessarily for legal purposes. Those described by Hallaq, even though they refer to a past authoritative practice of returning to the sources for new answers, their method and practice, and therefore their definition of ijtihād constitute something new. Bernard Haykel agrees: "Islamists share with liberals the idea that *itihad* will offer a panacea to the dilemmas of the modern age although, beyond calling for a return to the 'True Sources', these Islamists are mute about the modalities of such reform." Bernard Haykel *Revival and Reform in Islam*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.78. Also see John Voll's discussion of the Salayfiyya use of the idea in *Islam Continuity and Change in the Modern World.* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), pp. 251-253. See John Espoito *Islam and Politics.* 3rd ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1991), pp. 298-300.

thinkers).[42] Those who belong to both of these broad categories are indebted to ‘Abduh because he called for putting aside not just affiliations to different doctrinal or legal schools, but everything separating the individual and the community from the first sources.

Although Hourani does not recognize the importance of ‘Abduh’s effect on the ‘ulamā’[43] there is no doubt that ‘Abduh had both an underlying and an acknowledged impact. The attempt at renewal begun by ‘Abduh was continued through ‘ulamā’ like Mahmūd Shaltūt (1893-1963) and Shaykh Sha‘rāwī.[44] Between the time of ‘Abduh and Sha‘rāwī, enough had changed to prohibit us from considering Sha‘rāwī’s project a “modernizing” one. Unlike ‘Abduh’s concern to demonstrate for Muslims how they could live in the modern world and still be devout Muslims, Sha‘rāwi was concerned primarily with bringing modernity into the fold of Islamic understanding. Sha‘rāwī insisted that ideas originating in the rational mind, including scientific truth, had to be weighed by the scale of revelation. Only them could one decide if they were true or false, in a sense flipping ‘Abduh’s call for weighing the sources “in the scale of human reason.” So while ‘Abduh sought to use reason to understand revelatory knowledge in

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[42] The forth period, post WWII was when America and Russia rose to ascendancy and nationalism took on its full fervor as in the ideology of Abd al-Nasir. Albert Hourani, , *Arabic Thought*, pp. vi-vii.
[43] “His teaching was in the end to be rejected by many of those of those to whom he addressed himself, but remained working beneath the surface, the unacknowledged basis of the religious ideas of the ordinary educated Muslim.” (Houranip. 130) For a different view see Kate Zebiri, *Mahmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism* (New York: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press**,** 1993), p. 200.
[44] In an interview in Cairo in the summer of 2008, Sha‘rāwī’s disciple Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf told me that while Sha‘rāwi was the renewer of the twentieth century, Muhammad ‘Abduh was the nineteenth of the nineteenth century, thereby connecting Sha‘rāwī to ‘Abduh’s program of revival.

light of modern life, Sha'rāwī attempted to adapt modern life to his hermeneutic concerning revelatory truth.

In addition while 'Abduh's call opened the Qur'an to authoritative understandings outside of the 'ulamā' class, Sha'rāwī's call strengthened the 'ulamā''s claim to exclusive authoritative interpretations through their inherited hermeneutic. When he stated that rationality cannot be automatically trusted, Sha'rāwī claimed that reason is not only subject to revelation; when it contradicts revelation it is proven false. By making revelatory truth, not just primary, but the ultimate depository of all correct knowledge, he affirmed that those who are the most knowledgeable in the religious sciences (the 'ulamā') are absolutely essential to the community because they are trained to interpret the Qur'an and ḥadīth for the people.

Sha'rāwī also began his life as a public preacher and teacher in Egypt in the 1970's after an Islamic rejection of Western scientific/rationalistic thinking had come to the fore. Nasser's program of nationalism, based on European political ideas, had failed. Furthermore, European models of education had become the norm for Egyptian schools, and the technological innovation which helped to proliferate Sha'rāwī's message had already become a part of everyday life. All of these factors affected the direction and content of his preaching. Additionally, he taught in Saudi Arabia for many years and was influenced by some Wahhābi ideas, although he also disagreed with many. As a result his project did not revere Western thought but sought to grapple with the embedded elements of it as already lived by Egyptians, amalgamating those elements with a

foremost emphasis on the revelation as the ultimate source of knowledge, and on the ‘ulamā’ as the proper interpreters and transmitters of that knowledge.

Sha‘rāwī taught that the believer must be directed towards, and fortified by, the word of God in order to live according to God’s will. ‘Abduh wished to improve morality thereby strengthening society, staying focused on the goods of this world as they could be delivered through religion. Sha‘rāwī described the Qur’an as able to offer guidance and a means by which to judge the correctness of new realities because it was the ultimate source of truth. So while he called for a return to the sources, he did so for a different reason, because he was focused not only on the goods to be gained for society but on the salvation the individual could gain through proper understanding.

➾ Preaching

The institution of Muslim preaching is well suited to the study of how present contingencies both modify and are controlled by authoritative religious structures because throughout Islamic history preachers have used methods, and messages, that are both approved of and rejected by other more conventional religious scholars. This ambiguity is enhanced by the diversity inherent in the institution of preaching and its ability to respond change.

Jonathan Berkey, writing about preaching in medieval Islam, claims that studying preaching helps us understand the variation of Islamic religious experience at different times and in different places. This view opens the possibility of discovering variation

between particular groups, in their practices and historical contexts, instead of positing Islam as a monolithic unchanging entity (essentialism). However, studying the institution of preaching also gives us insight into the stable parts of Islam that we can label as tradition.[45] Berkey is right to emphasize both aspects, the institutions, texts and practices which represent the way religions survive, and the different ways they are experienced throughout different epochs and in different milieus. He claims that Islamic tradition is "a set of ideas, symbols and interrelated texts and practices that have a normative (although contested) force."[46] In the end for Berkey preaching represents a type of framework that embodies both continuity and change. He sees popular preaching, and popular culture in general, as being able to express this variation because it is fluid and changing by nature.

Yet preaching also offers us a vision of what comes forth from the interaction of these two elements in the discourse of the preachers and their critics. Through this discourse we can begin to discern how reality and stability are reconciled and how this reconciliation ensures the long-term survival of tradition. The vocation of preaching and the content of sermons has been a subject of controversy in Islam from early in Islamic history.[47] This is partly because the *quṣṣāṣ* (storytellers, preachers) who were not

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[45] Jonathan Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East,* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).
[46]Jonathan Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority*, p. 7. See especially the introduction for a valuable discussion about the theoretical distinction between studying "local" cultures according to a Geertzian model, or along the lines of Giselman who claimed that the word Islam itself was so broad as to have no particular meaning, and the study of "great" or "high" culture along the lines of Marshall Hodgson, an approach thoroughly critiqued by Edmund Burke as not representative of the common folk.
[47] Johs. Pedersen, "The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher," *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 2, Issue

officially employed as preachers in mosques had a certain amount of freedom in what they taught to uneducated people.[48] Many preachers throughout Islamic history did not belong to the most educated of the ‘ulamā’ classes (sometimes they were not ‘ulamā’ at all). Often the stories they told did not come from acceptable texts and at times they were even antithetical to Islam doctrinal foundations. As a result a literature of critique began almost as soon as the institution of preaching itself.[49]

Throughout Islamic history preachers of the common people have tended to disregard the criticisms put forth by men trying to defend a uniform vision of Islam such as Ibn al-Jawzī (d.597/1201) and his student Ibn Taymīya (d. 656/1258). These men sought to stabilize tradition by criticizing the nonconformist Muslim preachers, instead encouraging one method of preaching throughout the ages and in various places. While the popular preachers often had an expansive view of what elements of tradition were open to change, Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Taymīya and had a much more limited view. Owing to the fact that these two scholars were primarily concerned with the long-term survival of the tradition, they designated specific norms, such as the prohibition of telling

4 (1953), pp. 215-231. Pedersen writes that preaching took place among the *ta'ibun*, the first generation of Muslims after the Prophet and his companions. "Tamim al-Dari is generally mentioned as the first qass. But Ibn Sa 'd says, 'The first quṣaṣ was Ubaid b. Umair at the time of 'U'mar b. al-Khattab.'" Hasan al-Basri 21/642, d. 110/728. also belonged to the ranks of the preachers. (p. 217-218)

[48] "It is obvious that the free position of the common preacher gave him an opportunity of less controlled activity. As his aim was to impress his audience he was tempted to use the means fittest for that purpose, and as everybody might speak in an assembly which he could gather in the mosque or elsewhere, there was no guarantee for his learning and his sense of responsibility, the more so as his preaching was often followed by a collection of money." (Johs. Pedersen, "The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher," p. 218)

[49] "So the activity of the quṣṣāṣ became a real problem in the Muslim community and was open to severe criticism. It is impossible to tell when this criticism began…but in the 4th century of Islam the denunciation of them became more outspoken." Pedersen, p. 217

stories about the Prophets that were not found in the Qur'an or ḥadīth, as the only acceptable ones for preachers. The tension between these two visions, less and more expansive, has informed the discursive practice of preaching throughout Islamic history. It is the desire to remain faithful to a certain vision of religion combined with the variations of this vision in the lives of agents and practitioners that brings forth a compromise, one which can be considered authentic and still remain relevant.

Examining the critique of Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Taymīya, enables us to pinpoint the attempt to regulate threats through language. Their regulatory attempts concomitantly set forth a detectable corrective to those perceived threats. Similarly, Islamic preaching proves to be fertile ground for such analysis, particularly because it weaves together the stability of traditions with the everyday lives of the people listening. Therefore we can study the classical and pre-modern critiques of preaching to try to extract a sense of what the 'ulamā' who wrote them conceived of as the stable fundamentals of the tradition. This does not to pose a timeless quality on the entire history of the institution of 'ulamā' preaching. Indeed the very need for, and the very persistence of, such critiques points to the lack of standardization, in one particular time and over time. It also indicates that variation had a lasting effect on tradition as a whole. In fact the controversy itself demonstrates that certain elements of tradition remain intact and are defended through time while others are transformed or even abandoned over time or at a particular moment, even when this transformation is resisted.

In Ibn al Jawzī's[50] book *Kitab al-Quṣṣās w'l-Mudhakkurīn* (The Book of Islamic Preachers) he states that preachers are meant to remind the people of the importance of the afterlife. To illustrate this point he quotes Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (eponym of one of the four Sunni schools of law) who said of Islamic preachers:

> "The true *quṣṣāṣ* are those who speak about paradise and hell, who arouse people to fear, and who are upright in intention and honest in matters of ḥadīth…untutored persons who have no knowledge should listen to these people; perhaps they might take a word to heart and repent." (Schwartz,104-105)

For Ibn al-Jawzī the connecting thread between the people and the fear of day of judgment, which the preacher was supposed to inspire in them, was the revelation, and a preacher should never begin or end without reference to revelation.[51] But this did not mean that preachers were supposed to teach the rejection of the world for the sake of the after life, instead preachers were supposed to couple their reminders with a call for the modification of behaviors, reinforcing certain norms according to the laws of Islam. This constitutes two goals for the preacher: to remind believers of God and to establish norms by teaching believers how to live a proper life according to Islam.[52]

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[50] When visiting Shaykh Sha'rāwī's library in his home village of Daqadous in the summer of 2008 I was able to see a collection of books that had belonged to and been important to the him during his later life. There were a few authors who were well represented there, one of which was Ibn al-Jawzī.
Ibn al-Jawzī wrote hundreds of books ranging from theology to Qur'an to preaching.

[51] *Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb al-Quṣṣās w'l-Mudhakkurīn*, annotated translation and introduction by Merlin Swartz (Beyrut: Dar-ElMachreq Éditeurs, 1971), p. 97.

[52] "…*quṣṣās* were primarily intended to provide Muslim believers with the minimal means to observe the precepts of their religion and to run their lives in accordance with Muslim religious law. Yet *qusas* from its beginnings, had a second, no less important role, no less purely religious in nature than the first. This was the attempt to dictate behavioral norms: to teach believers to live modestly,
without greed, and to avoid (as far as possible) the quest for temporal luxuries and pleasures, as the true reward was to be had in the world to come-a belief in line with the slogans championed by
the Prophet and expressed in the Qur'an…. qasas tended to spill over into the areas of wa'i and tadkir, both

For the purposes of this dissertation, what is important in the work of Ibn al-Jawzī is the way he spoke of the following: the regulation of the activity of preaching, expectations intellectuals and traditionalists had of these men, the essentially linguistic nature of the preachers tools (for Ibn al-Jawzī preachers were meant to inspire change in their listeners by the power, and religious correctness, of their words), and the behavior of preachers, which was supposed to be spotless, because preachers were to be living examples. Popular preaching was meant to be heard by the common people and, according to men like Ibn al-Jawzī, its purpose was to establish acceptable practices amongst them. Hence, the conduct of preachers, during the sermons and afterwards as well, was considered important.[53]

How Ibn al-Jawzī defines what is proper and what is not constitutes a set of principles made up of procedures to which a preacher must adhere. These principles also contain boundaries for the content of the sermons and define what preachers are allowed to add of their own, thus enabling the preacher to address the concerns of the people. The truth of a preacher's speech is also important to the guidelines Ibn al-Jawzī set out. For example, the telling of false ḥadīths (a common practice amongst populist preachers) posed an actual threat to the continuation of the tradition, because the ḥadīth of Muhammad serves as a revelatory source in Islam. By constantly defending what they saw as the inflexible elements of tradition men like Ibn al-Jawzī attempted to protect the

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of which focussed on the need to shun temporal materialism and luxury, the brevity of this life and concern for the next, and the desirability of preparing for the Day of Judgement." "*Al-Qasas: Its Emergence, Religious Origin and Its Socio-Political Impact on Early Muslim Society"* Khalil 'Athamina *Studia Islamica*, No. 76. (1992), p. 64.

[53] Merlin Swartz, *Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb al-Quṣṣās*, Arabic p. 93, English p.179.

tradition as a whole by enforcing stability. In order for preaching to defend the essentials of faith, a preacher has to formulate reactions to new, potentially threatening circumstances thereby demonstrating that sermons incorporate both historical perspective and fortifications of foundational belief and practice. The content of this incorporation is exactly where variation can be found.

Variation and diversity have persisted in preaching even into the modern age. Two anthropological studies of Islamic preachers in the 20th century focus on the role of the preacher and the message of sermons in the modern Islamic context. Generally both studies consider the role of the preacher in Islam to be bound to the task of relating the texts (*nuṣūṣ*) to the everyday life of the believer. Richard Antoun in particular, argues that the preacher he studied in a Jordanian village over time, from 1960-1986, was able to link the texts to the people of the village. For Antoun preachers in the Muslim world are "culture brokers" who relate an Islamic message through a process of "the social organization of tradition" or the "accommodation of tradition." They do this by analyzing the process by which the Islamic message is handed down and how it needs to be interpreted for a particular clientele while dealing with a certain "religious and political hierarchy."[54] Borrowing from Redfield's classic study of social tradition, Antoun describes the social organization of tradition as a "two-way flow of ideas" between the learned men and women of society and the folk or peasants.[55] The learned tailor their

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[54] Richard Antoun, *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 9.

[55] Richard Antoun, *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World,* p. 13.

message so that it is acceptable to the views of the peasants (the little tradition), and do not push their own learned ideal of religion (the great tradition). The importance for Antoun lies in his positing and linking these two traditions, and the preacher's role as broker in accomplishing this. "Linkers" choose what to emphasize from the revelatory or other texts of the "great tradition", but at the same time the linker must "take a stance" on certain aspects of local culture. Studying how the "accommodation of tradition" takes place means emphasizing both the sermon (product) and the interpreter (linker).[56]

Antoun concluded that because Muslim preachers speak both about the divine and worldly life they do not fall prey to the theory that religious brokers are a hindrance to modernization. For Antoun, part of the job of preacher is to link religious lessons to modernity, which he concludes has led the preacher to "optimize" modernity by utilizing a balanced view: "neither complete neglect of this world or the next; neither complete immersion in the affairs of this world of complete immersion in preparation for the next." He goes so far as to say that some of the sermons he studied " lend themselves to the reinforcement of modernity." In fact, according to Antoun, the rise of modernity coincides with the rise of religious resurgence most probably as a result of people learning to "compartmentalize" their lives- a hallmark of modernization. But he also posits this concomitant rise as accidental.[57]

Antoun's notion of the preacher as linker is very useful for providing a way to bring together what are often considered separate parts of one singular religious tradition,

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[56] Richard Antoun, *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World,* pp. 13-18.
[57] Richard Antoun, *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World,* pp. 133-142.

especially as this pertains to the modern context. However, Antoun's categories are too well delineated, even for his own definitions, which actually indicate more flexibility between different trends and influences. For example in his discussion of little and big traditions in Jordan, his postulation of the preacher as linker could have led him to conclude that, because preachers make textual knowledge accessible to the people, there is plenty of room for overlap between the two. Otherwise wouldn't the work of the preacher be for naught? The textual traditions in Islam have been used specifically to alleviate a divide and to create a grey area, a means for the texts to become a part of people's lives, not just in response, but as practice incorporated into everyday life. This is especially true in the modern era where literacy has increased access to the texts and people have become much more focused on proper praxis.

In a similar way to Antoun, Patrick Gaffney, in his book on modern preaching in Egypt, emphasizes the distinction between religious institutions and popular forms and expressions of religion. He focuses on the role of the preacher as one who mediates between them. Gaffney's work offers a broader look at the institution of preaching by adding emphasis not only on the preacher and the audience but on social and political reality as well. Thus Gaffney tries to avoid clearly separating different strata of Islam into categories like high and low, or official and popular, and instead shows horizontal or vertical connections between the various traditions in order to recognize both a complex and interwoven reality. These inter-weavings cannot be separated easily because they are enmeshed into layers or strata. To understand these layers means considering the content

of sermons together with local ideas about what constitutes Islamic elements and with what are social, ideological, political and economic variances:

> "The messages and ideas that are conveyed through mosque preaching cannot therefore be isolated from other local, national and ultimately international spheres of experience and their corresponding systems of reference without sacrificing a large measure of a sermon's actual significance to those who hear it."[58]

In trying to overcome the drawbacks of viewing the great and little traditions of Islam as separate or even tiered in some neat way, Islam for Gaffney becomes both multiple and singular. His solution is to see belief systems as "shaping" and being "shaped" by circumstances. The preacher then is seen as one who in the local context combines the recent and present developments of his society with a type of social authority. Gaffney, as an anthropologist, takes social scientific approach to the institution of preaching, which is actually discourse delivered for the purposes of edification by preachers with particular views of religion.[59]

But preachers' sermons are not only delivered to the people in particular historical, social and political circumstances, they are primarily religious discourses. There are theological, doctrinal, epistemological and esoteric elements also contained in sermons, and these elements I will argue, are at the center of 'ulamā' preaching. Moreover the 'ulamā' engage the past not just as authoritative past but as a source of knowledge, because in the past the divine will has been manifest in history. Historical

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[58] Patrick Gaffney, *The Prophet's Pulpit Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt,* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1994) p. 30.
[59] Patrick Gaffney, *The Prophet's Pulpit,* p. 52.

and social circumstances help decide the expression of the sermons, even the way eternal knowledge is interpreted, but they do not override the main propose of the preacher, which is not just to shape circumstances but to allow them to be disclosed as a part of a theological purpose. ‘Ulamā’ preachers are foremost arbiters of religious tradition, not social or political actors.

Gaffney and Antoun also leave out a crucial third element in their discussion and that is precisely this focus on how a preacher interprets God’s intentions for humanity as disclosed in the revelation. While mosque preaching is in itself an articulation and the agent is the articulator, the content of the sermon, if it is to be considered a part of the tradition of preaching, must ultimately be focused on the goals of religious adherence. For this study, therefore, I will consider the way preaching brings together, not different aspects of an adherent’s life, but the many components of a sermon-the agent and what that agent represents, the relation of theological considerations to social and political reality, and the concerns brought by the audience- for the sake of clarifying God’s purposes, thereby reinforcing the goods of the tradition itself. The preacher accomplishes this by bringing all of those components into conversation and then rejecting or accepting contingents in light of what is eternal as necessary for this reinforcement. Finally the preacher must offer these reformulations to the people in order to instruct them. This process revivifies tradition at any moment by rearticulating the primacy of the theological origins of that tradition. Thus we can also view how the

sermon gives relevance to the preacher as the essential guide to living a properly religious life.

Therefore for my purposes the texts of the preachers of Islam will be given central importance but not in the traditional philological method, as Gaffney rightly condemns. Instead, I will combine analysis of sermons with local social and political realities to try to understand how they are related. In studying sermons it is important to discern patterns of discourse within them, to try to understand how preachers utilize social and political elements to reestablish the primacy of revelation and of ‘ulamā’ interpretations of revelation as an extension. The texts of preaching can then be understood through the way language is used to modify or strengthen what has come to the preacher from the past, while never loosing sight of the purpose of that alteration.

➢ Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha‘rāwī: An ‘Alim Preacher

Shaykh Sha‘rāwī successfully espoused the precedence of revelation over contingency without rejecting that contingency, by reviewing modernity in light of the greater goals of the tradition. However, in order to fully understand his success we will not categorize him or his role as an ‘alim-preacher according to external divisions or typologies, which can actually misdirect us from forming a clear picture of how religion continues to be effective in people’s lives in the contemporary age.[60] Studying the

[60] “Given the preoccupation with change, mobility and hybridity so characteristic of academic discourse at the turn of he millennium, it is not easy to come to terms with what is still the object of so much contemporary Islamic scholarship; to draw boundaries, deliniate spaces, and classify actions according to

'ulama' discourses according to their own conception and use of authority instead provides us with a more accurate way of looking at contemporary religious life in Islam.

Those writing on contemporary Islam often work with two assumptions that directly contradict the idea that Shaykh Sha‘rāwī and other ‘ulamā’ have inspired contemporary Muslims to seek guidance from revelatory sources. The first assumption is that tradition is dead, or near dead, and the second is that the ‘ulamā’ are stuck in the past, unable to respond to present challenges. [61] Because of these suppositions, many studies of contemporary Islam are done without consideration of two crucial elements, the role of the ‘ulamā’ in instituting a renewed sense of religiosity among the people, and the way they have accomplished this. Men like Sha‘rāwī, who was an effective agent of tradition, directly contradict the notion that modernization has completely undermined the authority of the ‘ulamā’ thereby making them irrelevant.[62] Instead he was able, through his sermons and lessons, to inspire people to look to the Qur'an and ḥadīth for guidance in their every day lives.

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what appear to be fixed categories of right and wrong..." Gudrun Kramer, *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, ed. Gudrun Kramer and Sabine Schmidtke. (Boston: Brill, 2006), p. 181.

[61] Zaman, *The 'Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, 2-10. Zaman gives an overview of the prevalence of this idea in academic writings. The 'ulama are often referred to as "traditionalists" a term used pejoratively to mean stuck in the past and not able to properly interact with the rest of the world, i.e. anyone outside of their sphere of religious learning.

[62] For a full discussion of this see Qasim Zaman's *The 'Ulama in Contemporary Islam,* chapter 1. He has an especially good discussion of this on pp. 2-3, where he claims that well-known scholars like John Voll and John Esposito make such broad unsubstantiated claims. See Esposito and Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam,* Introduction, pp. 14-16 in which they also identify the "conservative" nature of the per-modern and modern 'ulama' overlooking what has actually been a very diverse corp. Also see Patrick Gaffney, "Popular Islam, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science", Vol. 524, Political Islam (Nov., 1992), pp. 41 in which he says: "The corps of juro-religious scholars of old who functioned as intermediaries between multiple levels of a highly stratified society have, for all practical purposes, disappeared. In the nationalist vision of a society built on equality, the 'ulama'' have become superfluous as rational bureaucracies have replaced primary relationships of kinship and patronage."

Few studies have been done on how textual traditions have continued to actively engage Muslim practitioners, and even fewer have considered the form this active engagement is presently taking. In actuality the ‘ulamā’ have remained crucial in transmitting religious knowledge to Muslims in the contemporary world precisely through such textual traditions. Qasim Zaman argues that the ‘ulamā’ have remained relevant and at times politically effective, even though academics with diverse agendas consider them to be a relic of the past. He makes a case for the flexibility of the ‘ulamā’ and their discourses, a flexibility that has allowed them to change when necessary but has not forced them to abandon their use of traditional discursive methods. In proving the relevance of the South Asian ‘ulamā’ Zaman focuses on their social effectiveness, which he demonstrates by presenting their authority according to, "how that authority is constructed, argued, put on display, and constantly defended" even in the modern era.[63]

In the Egyptian context Raymond Baker has written about two ‘ulamā’ preachers, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī and Yūsuf Qarāḍawī, who are a part of what he calls the New Islamist Movement. This is a moderate movement, one that calls for a gradualist approach to implementing an Islamic system of governance.[64] Baker contends that this movement's religious and intellectual underpinnings come from these two immensely popular Azhari preachers. Yet, even though Qarāḍawi and Ghazālī are ‘ulamā’ preachers, Baker's focus is on their social efficacy. Both Baker and Zaman's findings

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[63] Qasim Zaman's *The ‘Ulamā’ in Contemporary Islam,* pp. 6-9.
[64] Raymond Baker, *Islam Without Fear* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). This book is an account of the social relevance of this movement in Egypt today.

can be taken a step further and applied to the contemporary religious, not just political or social, relevancy of the ‘ulamā’.

Political and social theories often overshadow religious concerns and as a result we are left with no clear picture of how religious authority (not just the authority of religious leaders) is functioning amongst the people today. The truth is that many Egyptians are more likely to listen to sermons and lessons (*durūs*) which explicate how they can live their daily lives as good Muslims, then to listen to ones calling them to action for political and social change in the name of their religion. This view does not discount that political action can be religiously inspired, as Zaman demonstrates, the two often overlap. Recognizing the importance of the religious components of sermons merely changes the focus from viewing religious discourse as a tool to considering it as part of the Islamic interpretive heritage. In order to begin to understand the formation of religious authority in the contemporary context, with or without political implications, we need to examine the influence of past religious language on the present through the interpretations of those who utilize their authority to mediate between the two. These mediators between the divine revelation and the lives of practitioners put forth programs that they hope will enable the public to apply theological knowledge to their lives. Although in Egypt there now exist many actors outside of the ‘ulamā’ class who claim this role, it is my contention that particular ‘ulamā’ are still seen as the true inheritors of this function. They have had to rethink the scope of their vocation by finding new avenues of expression and even, for some, by joining unlikely movements. For this

reason many ‘ulamā’ have increasing their presence in society through their time honored role as scholar preachers of the people. Preaching has also allowed them greater leeway within which to innovate.

The *durūs* (literally lessons, but here signifying sermons given outside the setting of the mosque)[65] of an ‘alim preacher like Shaykh Sha‘rāwī can help us decipher how, through language, he helped increase religious devotion while at the same time attempting to modify elements of the institution he represented in order to engage people. ‘Ulamā’ preaching can both incorporate and reject the current lived experiences of adherents through language. The openness of preachers to nontraditional source material, provides us with a different type of insight, one that highlights religious language as an aid in adapting the conditions of any given time to the eternal, sometimes altering elements of the tradition itself. For example, the lessons of many present day Islamic preachers in Egypt have great influence among the people, not only because of the popularity of the preachers, but also because they are reaching wider audiences thanks to the use of modern technology such as radio and television and recently the internet. Hence the discourse has been modified by being delivered through a new medium, for the purposes of the edification of the public. But in this case technology has also been adapted to religious purposes.

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[65] Preachers have been referred to by various names throughout Islamic history. See Gaffney, *Prophet's Pulpit* pp. 30-34. The literal meaning of the early names reflected the role of the early preachers, *quṣṣāṣ* were storytellers, *wa'iz* was admonishing, and the *mudhakirrūn* were reminders. Later on the lines between the different types of preachers became blurred, although a *khuttāb* still refers exclusively to a person who gives the sermon in a mosque on Friday during communal prayer time. Also today the word *durūs* is used to replace older words to signify sermons because men like Sha‘rāwī even though he is traditionally trained, do not see their lessons as sermons but in the modern context see it as lessons among other lessons. For more on this see chapter 2.

However, if we view the 'ulamā' as either irrelevant or merely as social and political actors we will not get a long term picture of how the Islamic tradition has been manifested in the modern era and how it will move forward in the future. For example academics have either ignored Sha'rāwī or, when they do give him attention, have called him a pawn of the government, someone who used his charisma and simple speech to control the masses.[66] He has even been accused of being merely a mouthpiece for the Wahhābis.[67] One scholar goes as far as to claim that the decline of the Azhari 'ulamā' in general:

> "Is illustrated by the rise of men like Muhammad Mitwalli al- Sha'rāwī who does not have the thorough grounding in Islamic scholarship….(so) panders to popular feelings and superstitions with literalist interpretations of things such as jinn and miracles appealing to a very low 'religious common denominator.'"[68]

Because academics are stuck with certain categories of understanding, such as fundamentalist, Islamist, literalist, or modernist, they see the 'ulamā' as either

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[66] The only chapter in English written on Sha'rāwī not only claims that he is a fundamentalist but also that he is too simple to be interesting see Hava Lazarus-Yafeh "Muhammad Mutawalli Al-Sharawi-A Portrait of a Contemporary alim in Egypt" in Islam, Nationalism, and Radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan, Edited by Warburg and Kupferschmidt, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983.) In addition there are many who when writing their books on modern Islam and radicalism do not distinguish between the actual program of Shaykh Sha'rāwī, Islamists or those they label fundamentalists. Instead they assume anyone calling for a "return to Islam" is not moderate. It is important that we study the actual texts of individual thinkers to distinguish differences in their discourse about Islam, politics and society. See Russell Baker *Islam Without Fear*, Malika Zeghal *L'Gardiens*, Gaffney *Prophet's Pulpit* and Zaman *The 'Ulamā' in Contemporary Islam* for more nuanced approaches.

[67] This claim was countered by Tim Winter who said that Sha'rāwī ould not have espoused Wahhābi ideology because Wahhābi ideology directly opposed Sha'rāwī's mystical leanings. Tim Winter Obituary - *Sheikh Mohamed Sha'rāwī*, 23 June 1998, The Independent - London, "One also has to wonder how such sloppy and misinformed characterizations are made, especially considering that they go against the very definitions of the categories themselves; how can an 'alim be both a radical Wahhabi and someone who controls the people for the government?"

[68] Kate Zebiri, *Mahmūd Shaltūt*, p. 182 . She quotes from Lazarus-Yafeh's chapter, "Muhammad Mutawalli Al-Sharawi-A Portrait."

capitulating and ineffectual, or as scripturalist and radical. As a result they do not know how to examine the importance of a man like Sha‘rāwī. The categories they use are also flawed because they are based on a limited understanding of Islam in the modern period, without consideration of how the past intermingles with the present. The idea that modernity forced a clean break with past authoritative intermediaries such as the ‘ulamā’ is not only false it necessitates ignoring how continuation has been manifested.

In truth what Sha‘rāwī represents, is something not at all considered by the above criticisms: that a person who is "thoroughly grounded in" Islamic scholarship could express concern for the religious life of the masses and could use his scholarship to lead those people to a greater understanding of their religion. What Sha‘rāwī signifies then is not a new category of ‘alim, but one that exists outside of academic categories because he was both connected to the past and effective in the present. Studying him as such will aid our understanding of the phenomenon that popular preaching represents today.

In Sha‘rāwī's case he was not calling for a return to a time bound interpretation. For him such a call would have amounted to limiting the scope of God's guidance by freezing it in time. Further, Sha‘rāwī did not discount the need for intermediaries or reject previous interpreters, he understood himself to be a mediator between the past and the future. Although he chose not to participate in certain past forms of interpretation or scholarly debates about the Qur'an, it was because he did not believe that this was what was necessary for his time. Instead he chose to offer his interpretation directly to the people, an interpretation that clearly established his connection to the past through his

expertise, but at the same time one that opened up new possibilities through his specific program of renewal.

In actuality Sha'rāwī's program proposed a middle way (*wasaṭīya,* more on this in chapter 2).[69] How should we judge such a program of moderation? Should we take the position that this label is only an attempt by men like Sha'rāwī to hide their real agenda of Islamism?[70] Or should we try to understand how his program was moderate, taking into account the content of Sha'rāwī's discourse and how it manifested in a particular historical context? Throughout the dissertation we will view Sha'rāwī's program not just in its context but in terms of how the people who followed it perceived it. Moderation then will be what is moderate to those who live the tradition and receive the message in their historical moment.

Let's take for example the phenomenon of wealthy women, often movie stars and entertainers, in Egypt who have decided to become *muhajibāt* (wearers of the head scarf). These women are often inspired by different types of 'ulamā' to consciously change their lifestyles in order to live what they believe to be a more "Islamic way of life." How should we view this phenomenon? One author explains it this way: "*Nouveaux riches* women under the influence of a radical Sheikh have taken the veil, surrendered their material possessions for Islam, and drastically altered their family lives to accommodate their new

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[69] See Russell Baker *Islam Without Fear* for a discussion of this term among what he calls "the new Islamists."
[70] For such arguments see the article, "Obituary - Sheikh Mohamed Mutwali Sharawi" By Adel Darwish.19 June 1998 The Independent - London

religious lifestyle."[71] Here we have an assessment of a cult like phenomenon, a nameless (except that he is "radical") person who influences women to wear the veil and drastically alter their lives. The influence of the Shaykh sounds almost like indoctrination for the sake of controlling the female subject. Since this author uses the familiar category of radicalism together with its usual associations, she is able to make these claims with no clear evidence except the choices women make after seeing the Shaykh. She offers us no insight into the reason why women have made the choice to become muhajabāt. Instead the idea of religious inspiration has been disregarded as merely some sort of tool, used in name to return women to a "more Islamic" life (i.e. to control them).

Let's contrast this to a statement made by a former Egypitan movie star, Hana Tharwat, who left her profession and began to wear hijab after a meeting she had with Sha'rāwī. Here's how she explained it in an Arab newspaper:

> "'Al Sha'rāwī was a wise scholar and very patient as he first listened to all my excuses about how I ensure that my job does not contradict Islamic principles.' Al Sha'rāwī gave her an example which shattered her concept of herself as a devout Muslim. Al Sha'rāwī told her that a person could not ask a tomato vendor to choose the best from among his wares. Similarly, she was choosing to abide by certain principles and ignoring others. 'At this point, I felt God's truth and realized how ignorant I was. So my husband and I decided to stop acting…life is an earthly test to determine whether one prefers to be obedient and choose the everlasting life or to enjoy this life and be a loser in the metaphysical one. A true Muslim is one who sees God in his heart. Everything in metaphysics is right and everything in real life is false because it fades and

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[71] Geneive Abdo, *No God But God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 10, later she clarifies this position names the radical as Omer Abd Al-Kafi. But at the same time she connects him to Shaykh Sha'rāwī through their influence on women's choices to put on the veil (p. 146-148). Even if Shaykh Abd Al-Kafi is a "radical" she needs to distinguish between the different actors she speaks about. She also needs to remember that even a "radical" Shaykh can not force a woman in Egypt to cover her head. There is a reason these women make this choice, sometimes against the wishes of their families, and this reason must be explored.

vanishes. It is God who led me on to the correct path,' she added."[72]

When Hana Tharwat tells her story it is as if she is discussing a completely different phenomenon than the author quoted above. Hers is an account of a conversion experience, one facilitated by the man who led her to God through a patient listening and the example of a tomato seller. This story, and its contradiction in the previous example, encapsulates much of what I will say about Sha'rāwī, based not just on this account but on the way people all over Egypt spoke to me about him. The story contains historical elements; late 20th century Egyptians were looking for guidance after Western ideals had failed them. This is just the background. In truth the story also offers us a means to refresh our appraisal of the reattachment people are expressing to religious principles by exploring the meaning these principles have to them beyond their manifested application.

First of all if we take our clues from the way the actress remembered what was most important to her, we can see that Sha'rāwī focused on the worship of God as the ultimate goal. He did not concentrate on any particular action, asking her to "surrender" her wealth or her will. Actually he used a metaphor to help her understand her decisions thereby leaving open the possibility of future choice. This story also gives us a glimpse of Sha'rāwī's method (his gentle, moderate way, his reference to the primacy of God's system and his role as an intermediary).

Tharwat's story also demonstrates the interactive nature of Sha'rāwī's authority. Tharwat began by telling us that Sha'rāwī was "wise and patient" focusing not on his

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[72] Gulf news - News from the United Arab Emirates – "Actress recalls how she Chose a Life of Piety," By Eman Abdullah, December 17 1999.

words but on the person of Sha‘rāwī. As a representative of the ‘ulamā’ he was trusted to be knowledgeable, but in the modern context, with the proliferation of those claiming the same knowledge, Sha‘rāwī had to have more, he had to be wise. He utilized his ‘ulamā’ credentials to convey his knowledge in a meaningful way and at the same time to demonstrate that he was the appropriate agent to facilitate her conversion. Thawrat had to believe that Sha‘rāwī had more than knowledge in order for her to trust him as she did in this story. Anyone could have told her about a tomato seller but her conversion depended upon her opinions of Sha‘rāwī and on the presence of his charismatic nature.

Sha‘rāwi also served here as an intermediary “shattering” her conceptions and leading her to the “realization” of God. He did this by conveying to her that human beings cannot rely on their own intelligence to decide right from wrong, but instead must rely on God’s system. He also demonstrated his absolute necessity as an ‘alim, a possessor and conveyer of knowledge and an intermediary between the believer and God. Intermediary status for him did not mean that he read the texts decided what they said and instructed the people on what to do. Instead he attempted to facilitate access to divine knowledge, which again implies that he had to engender the trust of those he led.

How was Shaykh Sha‘rāwī successful as an ‘alim preacher in this attempt? The rest of the dissertation will explore four different areas of his life and message as they are related to his context which help elucidate how and why Sha‘rāwī was able to propagate his particular message effectively among the people. The first is his own narrative, how he was perceived to live a pious life, or alternatively the life of a holy man. The second

and third are related to Sha'rāwī as a possessor of knowledge ('*ilm*). As a religious scientist, he had access to exoteric knowledge as it had been disclosed in the revelation. Through his use of this knowledge and his epistemology he was able to demonstrate the absolute necessity of the 'ulamā' as interpreters of the divine words. But as a man of God, he also possessed knowledge of the esoteric. This included his ability to extract hidden secrets from the Qur'an and his *karāmāt* (generally translated as "miracles" but here I mean the special marks of favor bestowed on holy personages by God). These favors along with access to esoteric secrets indicate the purity of the heart in those who possess them. All three of these dimensions, his life story, exoteric learning and esoteric understanding, are related to Sha'rāwī's effective authority, in that they represent a familiar authoritative paradigm and they depend upon public perception to enable effectiveness.

The forth aspect of Sha'rāwī's success has to do with the way he made his sermons appropriate for people to whom he preached, and includes his use of television. The suitability of his message also includes how Sha'rāwī adapted himself and his message, in content, delivery, and reception. This fourth factor is focused on adaptation while the first three, although they take the changed circumstances into account, reveal how Sha'rāwī assured continuance. In addition this fourth dimension does not directly engage his authority but is instead driven by the needs of the people, therefore it speaks directly to Sha'rāwī's role as an 'alim-preacher.

I will prove that it is the way these qualities were woven together in Shaykh Sha‘rāwī’s life and expressed in his preaching that gave him authority and engendered the love and respect of the people he preached to. In approaching Shaykh Sha‘rāwī in this way I am looking to the man, the message and the receivers of the message for clues on how to understand the phenomenon of the present ‘alim preacher. Through his preaching, Sha‘rāwi asserted the primacy of divine knowledge and used his access to that knowledge to institute a program of renewal for the modern age. Sha‘rāwī used the disruptive aspects of modernity to attempt to reinforce religious discourse, not in a reactionary way, but in a way thatwedded religious language to potentially threatening, modern forms of life. For him modernity’s effects served as proof of religious truth, so religious truth was not needed to counter modern effects but to teach believers how to live devout lives. His knowledge and the suitability of his program were strengthened by the fact that people recognized him as a holy man, which, as we will see in the next chapter, depended on their perception of him as a man who lived a life of devout piety.

Chapter Two

The Life of Shaykh Sha‘rāwi: The Importance of an Exemplary ‘Alim

Introduction

In this chapter we will focus Sha‘rāwī’s life and with how his life was perceived by those who retell its events. In his message Shaykh Sha‘rāwi explicated historical contingencies and eternal truth, and his life represented also contained concrete examples of both. In his life, these two aspects converged in the way he lived both as a pious man and as an ‘alim preacher, but this convergence was also perceived to exemplifying a modern godly life. In order to fully understand this ideal we will examine why people in Egypt repeat certain stories about Sha‘rāwī and what that repetition tells us about his historical significance during his lifetime and after his death.

Because academics have assumed that the main role of the ‘ulamā’ has been as legislators, the importance of paradigmatic behavior to their authority is often overlooked.[73] In their function as preachers the ‘ulamā’ serve the people directly, hoping to inspire proper belief and practice, not only through their words but through their pious behavior as well. In Islam, figures of authority model themselves on Muḥammad as a

[73] See Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), chapter 1. Liyakat Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet*, pp. 10-13, claims that ‘ulamā’ authority was related to Muhammad through knowledge. Hamid Dabashi relies on Weber’s notion of charismatic authority and the routinization of that authority through various categories of actors, the ‘ulamā’, the Sufis, and in Shi‘ite Islam the Imams. And while for Dabashi part of this authority came from how the relationship between the figure of authority and God was displayed, he still does not seriously consider pious behavior as part of this display. (*Authority in Islam*, chapter 1)

paragon of virtue by attempting to imitate his role as an exemplar of pious behavior. However, because of the way we have defined the authority of the ‘alim-preacher as depending on the compliance of the people, the authoritative value the ‘ulamā’ gain from their paradigmatic behavior is rendered effective only when the people believe in its veracity, which is displayed when they become involved in recounting stories of piety to others.

Therefore, when considering the influence of an ‘alim-preacher like Sha‘rāwī it is important to look at how the narrative of his life convincingly models the values and behaviors that he encouraged in others. Comprehending the full extent of his influence requires that we explore how people have imbued his life with meaning by continually relating certain aspects of it, which support their perception of him as a holy man. Why his disciples and family highlight particular occurrences in his life signifies more than simply a sense of his authority. Recurring thematic elements in the narrative of a twentieth century ‘alim-preacher elucidate the importance of certain religious concepts and institutions in this era by highlighting the aspects that are significant to those who repeat them.

Later in the dissertation we will explore the importance of Sha‘rāwī’s connection to exoteric an esoteric knowledge. But the trust that people place in the holy man when they accept him as a guide depends on how he displays his connection to God by living a righteous life beyond obligations, according to conceptions of piety present in his community. The holy man’s pious behavior is seen to verify his sanctity, hence he has

the ability to directly affect the perception of his godliness: "It is their desire to cling to the sacred that inheres in them and transforms their earthly life."[74] Thus effective authority if it is seen from within the tradition is multi-tiered and built in stages. For one understood to be holy, it requires more than expositions about, and displays of, knowledge, it also depends on the manifestation of godliness, which enables holiness to become a demonstrable part of an 'alim's life.[75] This holiness is demonstrable because the lives of holy men serve as religious instruction for those who record or repeat them. Merely in the act of telling, stories have instructive meaning for those who engage them.[76] As "sacred biographies" these narratives teach through the possibility of imitation. The telling of sacred stories presents the actions contained within them as "complex religious symbols, (which) could synthesize a multi-layered ethos with less ambiguity than an argument."[77]

Recently academics of hagiographic accounts have downplayed the importance in looking for facts in the lives of holy personages and instead search for significance in the retelling itself.[78] We will follow their lead when recounting Sha'rāwī's life and look to

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[74] Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 6-11.

[75] Joseph Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), pp. 82-85. Soloveitchik in describing the halakhic man, the man who lives according to the ideal laws of God, from within the tradition itself says: "Halakhic Man after he has perfected his ideal world with the laws, statues and judgments, decrees and legal details….constructs a world perspective that embraces the whole vast range of existence... (because) cognition should precede rapture…" (p. 85). He also says that for the Halikhic man infinity is bound to the finite through laws, measures and standards, which is how transcendence appears in empirical reality. "Holiness is the descent of the divinity into the midst of our concrete world." (p.108).

[76] See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Other People's Myths* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), chapter 7.

[77] Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, pp. 5-6.

[78] Omid Safi, "Bargaining with *Baraka:* Persian Sufism, 'Mysticism,' and Pre-modern Politics," *The*

the stories about him as, "primarily a medium for symbolic representation, since the essential thing being signified...(here the life of a holy man) exists outside a system where sign and signified can be empirically verified."[79] Furthermore, by examining which facets of sacred biographical accounts are retold we can gain insight into sociological and historical aspects of religious tradition. Sacred narratives signify how notions of holiness are at play at any given moment because their recounting means that they have been accepted and verified. By examining what remains important to believers amidst inevitable change, we can begin to get a picture of how people relate to standards of piety over time. In the contemporary context, it is important to understand what remains essential to believers, because institutions of religion have recently undergone an upheaval, which has resulted in modifications in belief and practice. This upheaval has also affected how and from whom Egyptian Muslims received religious instruction. Religious authority has been claimed by different types of actors within and outside of official religious institutions. Acceptance of the authority of the an ʻalim preacher who is also believed to be a holy man among other types of actors signals that learnedness and holiness remain important to people.

Moreover, many of the stories I was told about Shaʻrāwī's life directly engage the historical reality of his time by reiterating how he reacted to particulars as was befitting his designation as a man of God. By recounting his pious engagement with these particulars, his disciples and family were defending his status among the competition and

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Muslim World 90 (Fall 2000): pp. 267-268. More on the topic of hagiography in chapter 5.
[79] Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 13.

threats to his authority. Indeed this was the sense I got when people repeated stories about Sha'rāwī's life to me (and when I read biographical accounts).[80] Because there is so much competition for religious authority today, the bounds of that authority have been opened to non-religiously trained actors. Connecting Sha'rāwī to commonly accepted aspects of holiness through the telling of his life stories served to reinforced his special claim to authority amongst this diversity.

As we analyze the main elements of Sha'rāwī's life story we will be mindful of the following dynamics: how they display characteristics of a holy man upon which other aspects of authority can be built, how they are embedded in the community's ideals, how they signal his special status through a proper reaction to various occurrences, how history shaped the circumstances of his life, and finally how certain elements of tradition are still engaging the public. For example, there is the story of Shaykh Sha'rāwī's generosity and of his refusal to use his preaching to become rich. He did accept some money, including a few large donations, for the distribution of his message, which he distributed to the poor. But he left no money to his family, only small royalties from the television broadcasts of his sermons and from the newspaper, Akhbār al-Yom, which

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[80] The main sources for this chapter are interviews I conducted in the summer of 2008 with Shaykh Sha'rāwī's son, 'Abd al- Raḥīm al-Sha'rāwī, one of Shaykh Sha'rāwī's main disciples, Shaykh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Hanafy, and his wife, Mrs. Nour El Din Attia, and the director of the Sha'rāwī Center in Daqadous Engineer 'Abd al- Raḥman. I also attended lectures given by 'Abd al-Ra'ūf and by 'Abd al- Raḥim al-Sha'rāwī. In addition I conducted numerous informal interviews with people in Cairo who follow Sha'rāwī's message and consider him influential in their lives. I also consulted two semi-autobiographical books: Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah* (Cairo: Dar al-Nashr Hātīh, 1992) and Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī as told to Muḥammad Safwat Amīn, al-Iskandarīyah *Hayātī min Daqādūs ilā al-Wizāra : Al-Shaykh Muḥammad Mitawallī al-Sha'rāwī,* (Cairo: Sharikat Qāyitbāy lil-·Tibā'ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 1992). These books are comprised of interviews conducted and recorded by the authors, both of whom were great admirers of Sha'rāwī.

circulated his lessons in print.[81] His followers expressed to me that he refused to become rich from preaching because he believed that this would have corrupted his message by raising questions, between himself and God, as to his intentions. This concern originated in knowledge of proper behavior and in personal piety, but it also illustrated a desire for purification, especially in matters directly connecting the individual to God. It is the mark of a godly man, as it goes above and beyond prescribed duty, to place his devotion to God above possessions by refusing material wealth. The reiteration of correct motivations manifested in exemplary action demonstrates the existence of a normative standard for the behavior of a holy man, one that can be referred to without explanation.

Additionally, historical reality is evident in of Shaykh Sha'rāwī's choices. To receive money for his broadcasts would have meant accepting money from the government, which would have given his viewers a reason to question his motives thereby tainting his message. Corruption is recognized as rampant in Egypt society, especially as it pertains to the 'ulamā', who are now government officials and are often seen as no longer possessing true religious authority because of this influence. It also raises the pertinent contemporary question: In the present lucrative market place of ideas should an 'alim charge for his knowledge? These elements are all interwoven, and

[81] 'Abd al-Ra'ūf and Nour El Din Attia, correspondence March 2009. 'Abd al-Ra'ūf old me that Sha'rāwī never asked for money, but also he did not refuse what he was offered for his work. Once he was asked to sell his *tafsīr* (Quranic interpretation) to a Gulf Television station for a large amount of money but he refused and instead sold it to Egyptian television (for "his country") for a fee of only ten percent of the distribution. Also, whenever he received any money he used to spend it in *zakā*. He spent most of his money on students who could not afford their fees or on poor Muslims from all over the world. The last time someone offered to give Sha'rāwī a large amount of money he used it to build a hostel for foreign Muslim students.

because of that the stories surrounding these actions are the ones the people most often relate about Sha'rāwī.

The rest of the chapter will present the events of Sha'rāwī's life and will show how those events were perceived and retold. I will weave the historical facs and the popular perceptions together using the actual events as the scaffolding upon which I will build their significance. As illustrated in the story above Sha'rāwī's lived experiences are meaningful in the way they illuminate the realities of his particular historical context and in the ways they exemplify pious behavior. Like his authority itself this combination allowed his message to take root among the people.

Sha'rawī's Life

Muḥammad Mutawallī Sha'rāwī (his nickname was al-Shaykh al-Amīn al-Sha'rāwī) was born on April 16, 1911 in Egypt in the village of Daqadous. Daqadous is situated in the province of Mit Ghamr in Daqaliyya along the Nile delta about a two-hour drive north of Cairo. He studied in the primary religious institute and secondary school in Zaqāzīq, where he memorized the Qur'an by the age of ten[82]. In recounting his life, Sha'rāwī said that he always expected to become a farmer like his father,[83] but his early talents in Qur'an memorization and his aptitude for religious learning meant that he was singled out as a candidate to go onto higher learning at al-Azhar University in Cairo. The

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[82] Stating that an 'alim memorized the Qur'an at a young age has been important in biographies of the 'ulamā' since medieval times. It is proof of the capacity of the individual for religious learning since pre-modern Islamic primary education centered on Quranic memorization.
[83]Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzi *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, (Cairo: Dar al-Nashr Hātīh, 1992).

director of the Sha'rāwī Center in Daqadous relayed Shaykh Sha'rāwī's early life to me in this way:

> "From a very young age God prepared Shaykh Sha'rāwī for the job of *da'īya* (someone who summons others to the faith). When he was very young he was already reading and understanding very difficult books about Islam and he would sit with scholars who were very advanced and read these books with them. It was also clear to his mother that he was special so she married him off at a very young age so that he would be taken care of."[84]

At al-Azhar Shaykh Sha'rāwī enrolled in the college of Arabic Language where he attained his degree *(ijaza-'alamiyya)* in 1941. Two years later he went on to attain a degree in teaching from Al-Azhar.

While Sha'rāwī was a student he was involved with two political movements, both of which helped shape his socio-political outlook. The first came in 1934 when he took part in the student uprisings, which began at al-Azhar and spread to different areas of Egypt. At the time al-Azhar was primarily a religious institute, but it was also a center of political activity throughout the modern period. The 'ulamā' of al-Azhar had been participating in political opposition from the time they had attempted to resist Napoleon in 1798. They were also associated with the 1805 overthrow of the Mamluks, the Orabi uprising in 1881-1882 and the revolution of 1919. [85] As early as 1897, some of the

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[84] Engineer 'Abd al- Raḥman, Sha'rāwī Center, Daqadous, Egypt, June 2008.

[85] Professor Yunan Labib Rizk, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 13-19 May, 2004, Issue number 690. He says: "Starting in 1798 Azhar was part of the nationalist resistance against the Napoleon after which it was instrumental in bringing a final end to the tyranny of the Mamluks and placing Mohamed Ali on the Egyptian throne (1805). In the latter half of the 19th century, a number of Al-Azhar scholars were active supporters of the Orabi uprising (1881-1882), to the extent that in The Secret History of the British Occupation, Mr. Blunt observes, 'There arose in Al-Azhar a movement akin to a revolution.' A few decades later, during the 1919

'ulamā' of Al-Azhar were active in the early stages of the Egyptian nationalist movement.[86]

In the same tradition of 'ulamā' political activism, the student protests of 1934 were inspired by nationalist political sentiment, specifically the Azhari 'ulamā''s involvement with the nationalist Wafd Party. The student protests were centered on their demand that Shaykh Al-Maraghi, a member of the Wafd Party, be reinstated as the head of al-Azhar. Al-Maraghi, who was a student of Muḥammad 'Abduh, had resigned in 1929 when the Egyptian King Fuad failed to ratify a change in the charter of al-Azhar allowing the institution to introduce new non-religious subjects. Al-Maraghi and other religious officials since the time of Muḥammad 'Abduh had been calling for the broadening of Azhari education because they believed that students would be better prepared for the world of employment if they were educated in secular as well as religious subjects. In addition in 1930 the newly ratified Egyptian constitution gave the king more power over al-Azhar. The student uprisings of 1934 were related to the their desire to see al-Maraghi reinstated, but also to see his vision for al-Azhar and for Egypt realized; in this regard the 1934 uprisings were directly related to the political situation in Egypt at the time.

In 1934 student protesters stood outside of the prime minister's premises "declaring their support for the Wafd Party and calling for the dismissal of the rector of

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Revolution, the celebrated mosque became the podium for the speeches and declarations of solidarity between Muslim and Coptic leaders, notable among the latter of which was Archbishop Sergius."

[86] George Annesley, *The Rise of Modern Egypt : A Century and a Half of Egyptian History 1798-1957* (Durham: The Lentland Press Ltd., 1994), p. 194.

Al-Azhar."[87] In recounting this period of protest Shaykh Sha'rāwī mentioned that he played an important role in supporting the Wafd Party and that he was a student leader in the nationalist movement, even calling himself "Wafdi." Eventually, in 1935, the demands of the students were met and al-Maraghi was reinstated. But some of the leaders of the student movement were thrown in jail and Sha'rāwī spent 30 days in solitary confinement in Zaqāzēq. (BS.Q)[88].

In recounting the importance of the nationalist movement to him, Sha'rāwī said:

> "I was Wafdi such as it was. And in the year 1938 we attended a celebration of the memory of Saad Zaghloul (the first president of the Wafd Party) and I went…. we considered the memory of Saad [important] because according his brand of nationalism we [were able to say] what we wanted to say. At this celebration I recited a poem in praise of Saad Zaghloul and his deputy Mustafa Nahās. But what we expected did not happen, instead the opposite of what I expressed with this poem welcoming the revolution happened." (43)

In retelling these events Sha'rāwī expressed the idea that politics can not give people what they hope for. Through this example Sha'rāwī shows that even though early on in life he became involved in politics he, like many of his generation, eventually realized the limitations of placing hopes in political solutions.

Another important moment for Sha'rāwī came in 1938 when as a student he became involved with Hasan al-Banā, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan Al-Muslimīn*). Among the first publications of Hasan al-Banā was a leaflet explaining the basics of the organization and their first general guide, both of which were originally

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[87] Professor Yunan Labib Rizk, Al-Ahram Weekly, 13-19 May, 2004, Issue number 690,

[88] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, pp. 43-44.

handwritten by Sha'rāwī.[89] But Sha'rāwi did not remain with the Muslim Brotherhood for very long. When asked, in his memoir, about his relationship to Hasan Al-Banā and why he separated from the Muslim Brotherhood, Sha'rāwī answered:

> " This is the story of my separation from the Muslim Brotherhood…When the story of the poem I recited in praise of Mustafa Nahās (see above) reached Hasan al-Banā he was angry and he admonished me about this poem. I said to him: 'Ya Shaykh Ḥasan, if we examine the leaders of the nation today to see who is closest to God's way, so that our souls and spirits can be with him, then we will find only Nahās as he is a good man, he does not smoke cigarettes or engage in other negative behavior. If we must pursue one of the politicians then it has to be Nahās. He is the [only] politician we [can] follow.' Shaykh Ḥasan answered saying: 'He is one of our enemies. Because he has the support of the people (*sha'ab*) he alone is able to hinder our [progress]. But it is in our power to spit on them all.' And from that moment I separated from the Muslim Brotherhood."[90]

It was also recounted to me by Sha'rāwī's son and disciples that he left the Muslim Brotherhood because he did not believe in resorting to violence for the sake of changing the government.[91] But the story above illustrates another important aspect of Shaykh Sha'rāwī's life and his political philosophy. He did not place his hope in political systems and therefore did not believe in forcing change. For Sha'rāwī politicians had to follow the basic rules of Islam in order to be supported, but even if they did not live according to the law, people could not resort to unsanctioned behavior to try to institute a more Islamic government. Instead, from this moment on, Sha'rāwī saw change in terms of how individual believers lived their lives. This does not mean that he did not speak

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[89] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, p. 40.
[90] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, pp. 41-44.
[91] Interviews Cairo, June and July 2008.

out about political decisions when he disagreed with them; he still expressed disagreements, and feelings of political disenfranchisement. However this did not result in him shifting focus away from his belief in the importance of correct human action and intention towards a belief in the necessity of political action for Islamic purposes. The above stories show that it was important that this orientation be emphasized and understood to have been set when he was still young.

In 1943 after Sha'rāwī received his teaching certificate, he was appointed to teach at the religious institute in Tanta, and later at the primary religious institute in Zaqāzīq and then at the Religious institute in Alexandria. Sha'rāwī recounted how he felt when he graduated from Al-Azhar conveying his ideas about the responsibility and authority of those who are the representatives of religious knowledge:

> "I was always aware that in every place I was a [member] of al-Azhar and therefore that I was an example. So I behaved [according to this status] in my movements, life circumstances, dress and actions stemming from my surety that the 'ulamā' of al-Azhar are examples to the people. I carried on my shoulders, with my 'ulamā' colleagues, the responsibility [to engage in] model behavior, which must reflect a scholar of al-Azhar. There was an awareness of the extent of the [importance] of the [Al-Azhar] degree, which we carried around our necks, concerning the book of God and the Sunna of his Prophet."[92]

In 1950 after seven years of teaching in Egypt Sha'rāwī went to teach in Saudi Arabia where he worked as a professor of sharī'a and theology in the College of King 'Abdul Aziz in Mecca. Shaykh Sha'rāwī excelled in his career as a teacher of theology and law in spite of the fact that his original degree was in the Arabic language. As a

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[92] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī as told to Muḥammad Safwat Amīn, al-Iskandarīyah, *Hayātī min Daqādūs ilā al-Wizāra : Al-Shaykh Muḥammad Mitawallī al-Sha'rāwī*, pp. 112-113.

result he rose through the ranks of ‘ulamā’ in Saudi Arabia and eventually came to the attention of the King.[93] His son told me a story about Sha‘rāwī which illustrates this influence. In 1955 when the Saudis decided to enlarge the holy shrine at the Ka‘ba they wanted to move the footprint of Abraham. The Saudi government, under the advice of the council of religious scholars known as the “Council of Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil,” had decided to move the footprint to a different area where it could be more easily accessed. Visiting Abraham’s footprint is part of the ritual of Hajj and as a result the area around the footprint would get very crowded and sometimes problems would arise. When Shaykh Sha‘rāwī heard about the plans to move the footprint he became “annoyed and surprised” so he sent a telegram to King Saud telling him that it was forbidden for him to move Abraham’s footprint because:

> “‘God has placed Abraham’s footprint where it is now therefore you can not change it. Even though it was moved before (it was moved by the second Caliph Omar Ibn Khatab) we can not reach the degree of Omar so we can not do such things (i.e. move the footprint from where he placed it).’”

The King asked to meet Sha‘rāwī inside the circle surrounding the footprint and Sha‘rāwī advised him to put the footprint inside a large transparent glass box which would expand the viewing area and allow people to see it and pray at it. The King, much to the annoyance of the Council of Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil, took the advice of Sha‘rāwī and built a new encasement according to Sha‘rāwī’s specifications.[94] This

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[93] ‘Abd al- Raḥīm al-Sha‘rāwī, Sha‘rāwī Center, Cairo, Egypt, June 2008.

[94] Interview ‘Abd al- Raḥīm al-Sha‘rāwī, Cairo, Egypt, June 2008. The end of the story is very interesting as well. After the solution was reached the King offered Shaykh Sha‘rāwī a monetary reward. But Sha‘rāwī did not want to accept it so he told the king: “I know that the gift of kings can not be refused and can not be given back but I asked God (to make) this fatwā (about the footprint not being moved) purely for

story, like many others told about Sha‘rāwī, illustrates both his importance as an Islamic scholar and his independence from other scholarly opinions of his day. Actually the two are related, by emphasizing that Sha‘rāwī took an independent stance in preserving one of the ritual pillars of Islam, his son was highlighting his exclusive status as an ‘alim with superior understanding of the past and of God's intentions. The story also serves to re-enforce Sha‘rāwī's moderate stance since his disagreement was with the Council, known to be extreme in many of their positions, and not with the Saudi King, who is still seen by many in Egypt as the leader of the Sunni Islamic world. Beyond this, it illustrates Sha‘rāwī's position as a religious "advisor to kings" something emphasized at the Shaykh Sha‘rāwī Center in Daqadous where pictures of Sha‘rāwī and many Muslim kings and heads of state are prominently displayed. When I asked about those pictures I was told that many leaders had looked to Sha‘rāwī for religious advice during his lifetime.

In 1963 Gamal ‘Abd Al-Nasr, the President of Egypt, and Kind Saud had a disagreement, so Nasser prevented Sha‘rāwī from returning to teach in Saudi Arabia. He was subsequently appointed as the director of the office of the Shaykh Al-Azhar who was, at the time, Hasan Mamūn. During his time as office director Sha‘rāwī clashed with Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasr because he opposed Nasr's close ties with communist Russia. As a

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his (sake). So please help me, I desire to be sincere and I do not want to take this money." Then Sha‘rāwī began to cry so the King gave him his coat as a reward instead. This part of the story carries with it its own pious significance illustrating the purity of Sha‘rāwī's actions and intentions. It also illustrates his independence from political power and that his love of God was stronger than his fear of kings. Two themes that are repeated often in the retelling of his life because they are very important to the people of Egypt.

result Shaykh Sha'rāwī was sent to Algeria to head an official delegation of Al-Azhar graduates sent to help the Algerian government reintroduce the Arabic language to the people after the revolution.[95]

The Azhari scholars sent to Algeria were very unpopular, which resulted in their mistreatment. Shaykh Sha'rāwī attributed this to Egypt's disastrous role in the 1967 war with Israel, and the defeat of the Arab armies. But it was also partly because of the inadequacy of the Egyptian teachers who were sent to villages all over Algeria. Many of these Egyptians acquired the reputation throughout Algeria as sub-standard teachers, which added to the Algerian rejection to anything associated with Egypt.[96] Sha'rāwī recounted that the Algerians even rejected the sale of Egyptian bread, forgetting Egypt's role in the revolution.[97]

During his time in Algeria Sha'rāwī met the Sufi Shaykh Muḥammad Bil Kaid, of the Hibir Sufi order in the Telmcen region, along with many other Algerian Sufi masters. Bil Kaid was a spiritual guide for Sha'rāwī, although Sha'rāwī never officially entered the Hibri Sufi order by promising allegiance to the Shaykh. As their relationship was explained, Sha'rāwī had had many dreams about Bil Kaid beginning twenty years before they actually met. In these dreams, Bil Kaid would give Sha'rāwī advice on matters that were confusing him. However, it was stressed to me that in some regards

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[95] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, p 10.
[96] Professor William Quandt, University of Virginia.
[97] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, p.60-70. I think here Sha'rāwī was referring to the fact that many Algerians who took part in the revolution and had important roles in the new government had been students at al-Azhar and had received some funding for the revolution from the Egyptian government at the time.

Sha'rāwī was also a teacher of Bil Kaid.[98] Sha'rāwī was not widely known as a Sufi in Egypt during his lifetime or afterwards. Most of the people I spoke to about him, did not cast Sha'rāwī as a Sufi, despite the fact that when one listens to or reads Sha'rāwī's sermons it is difficult to overlook the elements of his thought that were inspired by Sufi ideas. It was important for Sha'rāwī to keep this aspect of his life private because, not only do Sufis not usually talk about their affiliations, especially in the anti-Sufi climate of late twentieth century Egypt, but also because of his extensive time teaching in Saudi Arabia.[99]

It was also during his time in Algeria that Sha'rāwī began his life as a popular preacher, "in Algeria when he spoke the mosques would fill with people and sometimes the crowds would spill onto the streets."[100] Sha'rāwī recited poetry often in his preaching and saw poetry and storytelling as meaningful literary genres for conving his ideas to the people. During his time in Algeria Sha'rāwī began composing original poetry on diverse subjects; he wrote political and religious poetry, poetry about society as well as natural descriptions. His poetic style was heavily influenced by important Arab poets of the past. He was a great supporter of Arab poets in his time and he was especially fond of the Egyptian poet Ahmed Shawki. Additionally Sha'rāwī was known to enjoy Egyptian music and spoke of his appreciation of the famous Egyptian singer 'Abdul Wahāb.[101]

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[98] Engineer 'Abd al- Raḥman, Sha'rāwi Center, Daqadous, Egypt, June 2008.
[99] In chapter 5 we will explore Sha'rāwī's connection to Sufi ideas in detail.
[100] 'Abd al- Raḥīm al-Sha'rāwī, Sha'rāwī Center, Cairo, Egypt, June 2008. He had an interpreter who would translate his sermons into French as he spoke.
[101] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī, in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah, p. 81*

When Shaykh Sha‘rāwī returned to Al-Azhar after his time in Algeria he was appointed, by the director of *awqaf* (religious endowments), as the director of *da‘wa* (preaching) and thought at Al-Azhar. A few years later he returned to Saudi Arabia to again teach at the University of Malik ‘Abdul ‘Aziza in Mecca . He returned home to Egypt in 1976 this time because he was selected to become the Minister of Religious Endowments. According to Sha‘rāwī during his time as the Minister he tried to clear the ministry of the corruption, neglect and bribery, all of which were prevalent throughout the ministry.[102] He recounted that he was shocked by the extent of the corruption, which ran rampant throughout the Ministry and for this he blamed the four previous ministers. He fired some of the most corrupt directors, many of whom were lying about the actual wealth of the endowments in order to pocket the money or sell it through bribes. Shaykh Sha‘rāwī spoke of his time as the Minister of Religious Endowments as being very difficult because of the enemies he made trying to purge the Ministry of corruption. Eventually he saw this task as impossible and he left in the Ministry in1978, after less than two years in office.[103]

In 1980, at the age of fifty-nine, Shaykh Sha‘rāwī appeared for the first time on the television show *Nūr ‘ala Nūr*, Light upon Light, with Mahmūd Farag. On that first show he spoke about *Isra* and Marāj, (Muḥammad’s night journey to heaven) reciting a poem he had composed about Muḥammad’s journey. He was invited back many times

[102] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha‘rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha‘rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, p 15.
[103] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha‘rāwi as told to Muḥammad Safwat Amīn, al-Iskandarīyah, *Hayātī min Daqādūs ilā al-Wizāra : Al-Shaykh Muḥammad Mitawallī al-Sha‘rāwi*, p. 18.

and his appearances became so popular that eventually the show became his. He changed the format from a question and answer show to a show containing his “thoughts” (*khawāṭir*) about various topics in light of his Quranic interpretations. The show was run on state sponsored television as a part of the Egyptian government’s attempt to counter *jihadi* rhetoric, which was on the rise at the time, with a more moderate religious message. Several Egyptian preachers began broadcasting at this time, but none of them enjoyed the popularity of Sha‘rāwī. In Egypt people frequently told to me that the reason for Sha‘rāwī’s overwhelming success was that he was able to take complex ideas from the Qur’an and explain them in simple ways because of his talent with the Arabic language. At certain points in his career as a television broadcaster his sermons could be seen on television four times a week. He continued his television preaching until he became too ill to broadcast right before his death in 1998.

During his lifetime Shaykh Sha‘rāwī funded many charitable projects in and around his village of Daqadous, including the Sha‘rāwī Islamic Compound which houses a library and rooms open to the public and behind which sits his tomb. He also helped to build a primary school called Ali ibn Abi Talib and a mosque near the school. He built another Azhari primary school near Daqadous. He also set up public gardens in Daqadous and built a large mosque, called Sidi Muḥammad Nasser ad-Din Al-Arab‘ayn. In addition he funded an apartment complex with twenty-five apartments to house low income families who pay minimal rent each month. He also built the Shaykh Sha‘rāwī

Hospital in Daqadous.[104] Charitable work was very important to Sha‘rāwī, as a living quality of faith. His extensive charitable work demonstrated his dedication to distributing his wealth, with the stated intention that his work be dedicated to God and that it not be for the purposes of worldly gains.

➢ Lasting Political and Social Influence

This section will focus on specific events in Sha‘rāwī's life that stand out because they speak to his lasting importance among Egyptians today. They also highlight his political and social significance, his popularity, and the consistency between his actions and his message. Sha‘rāwī's political and social importance did not derive only from what he said in his sermons, it was also demonstrated through his life, which exemplified his belief that living according to God's way was of primary importance. He understood that he was a living example to those who followed his teachings and therefore, as he said above he: "carried on (his) shoulders the responsibility [to engage in] model behavior." The incidents I will recount in his section help demonstrate how the people received his life and message. The following specific events illustrate how Sha‘rāwī remains influential in his society, until today. In particular they are: the emphasis he placed on disseminating his message which led him to broadcast on state run television, his view of the peace process between Egypt and Israel, a speech he gave to Egyptian President Husni Mubarak in 1995, his views on women's modesty, and his follower's perceptions of him after his death, especially as it relates to popular Sufi rituals.

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[104] From an information sheet about Sha‘rāwī that is distributed at the Sha‘rāwī Center in Daqadous, 2008.

Sha'rāwī understood preaching to be primarily for the purpose of disseminating the proper message. With his lessons, he hoped to summon people to God through his interpretations of the Qur'an and Sunna. When I asked why he decided to preach on television I was told by many who knew him that what was important to Shaykh Sha'rāwī was that his sermons reach as many people as possible and he thought that the best way to assure this exposure was through the medium of television.[105] Television was not an obvious choice for an 'alim at the time, and Sha'rāwī was among the first Arab television preachers.[106] Sha'rāwī did not think that technology was inherently evil, or that it necessarily led a believer astray. Instead he said that every person is "capable of changing the channel" if something comes on the screen that is inappropriate. He watched television and even took his family to the movies when there was something appropriate to see. He did so in part because, "it helped him understand the people he was preaching to."[107] His acceptance of television and his choice to utilize it for religious purposes serves as a paradigm for how he conditionally embraced modern reality when he could adapt it to religious purposes.

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[105] Engineer 'Abd al- Raḥman, Sha'rāwī Center, Daqadous, June 2008. For the importance of television to Egyptians see Lila Abu Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). She states that there is a television in every Egyptian home. Also see Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernization in Egypt* (New York:Cambridge University Press,1996), especially chapter 1.
[106] There is still some controversy over the legality of television according to Islamic law especially among the Wahhābis. See Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, *The Islamic Ruling Concerning At-Tasweer* (Philadelphia: Zakee Muwwakkil Books and Articles, 1998). He quotes many ḥadīth and then offers fatāwa refuting Qaradāwi's opinion about the permissibility of the use of television. The book ends with fatāwa by many well known conservative Saudi 'ulamā' and their opinions against taswīr (image making) including Shaykh Ibn Baaz.
[107] Engineer 'Abd al- Raḥman, Sha'rāwī Center, Daqadous, Egypt, June 2008.

Because Sha'rāwī viewed technology as neutral and because his idea that the value of the message was paramount, he was able to use television to spread religious ideas thereby proving that technology was compatible with religion. Sha'rāwī's understanding that the media, when used properly, was a powerful tool for summoning people to God demonstrated his idea that renewal included reaching as many people as possible by using means already present in their lives. Television proved to be very effective in this goal, as I was told by countless Egyptians that on Friday afternoon, when Shaykh Sha'rāwī was on television, "the streets would be empty" and "people would rush home after *juma'a* (communal) prayers" to watch him with their families.[108]

All of the means Sha'rāwī used to distribute his thoughts emphasized that bringing believers back to the straight path was the ultimate goal. Shaykh Sha'rāwī did not write any of his own books, he only spoke during his broadcasts, giving the *dars* (lesson) on Friday afternoons. The week after Sha'rāwī delivered his lesson on television it would be published in the newspaper, *Akhbār al-Yawm,* but only after he had had a chance to correct it.[109] He also had a policy of allowing people to write books or articles based on his talks, with the stipulation that he would have the right to check the words before they were published, and he did not ask for royalties for these publications.[110] Many books containing Sha'rāwī's thoughts have been published in Cairo on various subjects,

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[108] This opens up many interesting questions about whether divergences in the way the message is received changes the relationship between the believer and her religious thoughts and actions, and the role the 'ulamā' play in instituting these changes. We will explore these in chapter 6.
[109] The tactic of using the newspapers to publish religious messages was begun in Egypt by Muhammad 'Abduh, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 155-160.
[110] Engineer 'Abd al- Raḥman, Sha'rāwī Center, Daqadous, Egypt, June 2008.

including politics, ethics, women and the family, and good and evil, all culled from his televised lectures. His *tafsīr* (Quranic exegesis) was also written this way, although it was his disciples, specifically, who put together an exegesis of the entire Qur'an from his weekly television sermons. [111] Hence, the "writings" of Sha'rāwī that are available everywhere in Cairo today do not give a clear sense of the man as a preacher, but do provide a systematic accounting of his thoughts on various subjects, which would be more difficult for the public to glean from individual sermons. Unfortunately, after Sha'rāwī's death people began to take advantage of the loose agreements he had with authors and some controversy has recently arisen over some of the books claiming to be derived from his sermons.[112] All of the books that he approved, however, were taken from his television programs and interviews, with the exception of those of his *fatāwa* that were written before he became a public preacher.

By virtue of the fact that many Egyptians told me that Sha'rāwī conveyed a deep knowledge of the Qur'an when he spoke, I asked if he gave special talks to learned groups. I was told that he did not; instead people were able to take what they were capable of understanding from his lessons. Some understood the deeper meanings and some only what was readily apparent. This type of comment is one that is often repeated about the Qur'an itself and is used especially by the Sufis to explain the way in which

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[111] An entire Arabic version of his *tafsir* is available at www.altafsir.com, in addition a project is currently underway to have it translated into English.

[112] Engineer 'Abd al- Raḥman, Sha'rāwī Center, Daqadous, Egypt, June 2008. He also told me: "Also during Shaykh Sha 'rāwī's lifetime he did not like it when people wrote things about him that weren't true, for example that he was from the ahl al-bayt (Muhammad's family) or showing him with green light around him (implying that he was from the ahl al-bayt). And the soap opera (*silsila*) that was made about his life for Egyptian TV was not correct. It told many untrue things about his life."

they derive their special spiritual knowledge from the Qur'an.[113] Sha'rāwī's use of television allowed him to broadcast the secrets of the Qur'an on state run television, signifying a shift in how the message is received and by whom.

Although Sha'rāwī spent the last years of his life broadcasting on national television, which from the point of view of the state, which the state encouraged for its own purposes, his broadcasting did not end his involvement in political disputes. In confirming the need to have the support of moderate preachers to counter the more extreme messages available on the streets and in some mosques, the Egyptian government created a space for men like Sha'rāwī, especially because of the immense popularity he enjoyed, to put forth their own views of political and social events, even when they contradicted official government policy. One such disagreement came after President Sadat went to Israel to negotiate peace.

When Egyptian President Anwar Sadat originally decided to make peace with Israel Sha'rāwī was in favor of his decision and even encouraged Sadat to travel to Israel so that he could negotiate a peace treaty in person. Sha'rāwī also supported the United Nations Resolution of 1948 which called for the partitioning of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. Sha'rāwī received much criticism for his backing of Sadat in the early stages of peace. Some Egyptians accused him of being a pawn of Sadat, especially because Sha'rāwī was Minister of Awqaf during Sadat's reign, a label that his disciples are still keen to dispute. As a result, he modified his recommendation by

[113] More on this topic in chapter 5.

publicly stated that as soon as the Arabs were powerful enough they could demand that the land be returned and if necessary they could even fight Israel for it. A disagreement also arose between Sha‘rāwī and the first Israeli ambassador to Egypt concerning two other statements made by Sha‘rāwī during his television sermons. The first came when he interpreted some verses of the Qur'an[114] to mean that the Arab-Israeli struggle would continue until the end of times.[115] Although 'Abd al-Ra'ūf told me that it was a coincidence that Shaykh Sha‘rāwī gave his interpretation of these verses at the same time that the peace treaty was being negotiated, it angered many Israelis who assumed that Sha‘rāwī was offering his interpretation as a statement of protest against peace. Moreover, Shaykh Sha‘rāwī's interpretation of another verse from the Qur'an was thought to indicate that he was against any peace which was partially negotiated by the Israelis.[116] The verse reads:

> "For never will the Jews be pleased with you, nor the Christians, unless you follow their creeds. Say: 'Behold, God's guidance is the only true guidance.' And, indeed, if you follow their errant views after all the knowledge that has come to you, you will have none to protect you from God, and none to bring you aid."[117]

In his interpretation of this verse Shaykh Sha‘rāwī clearly states that all knowledge of right and wrong originates with God, and therefore that Muslims should only make decisions based on the revelation that was given to Muḥammad. Even though the Jews

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[114] Qur'an,17:1-10

[115] E-mail correspondance with Noor Attia and 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, March, 2009.

[116] E-mail correspondance with Noor Attia and 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, Janurary 2009.

[117] Qur'an 2:120. Translation by Asad, with slight modifications.

and Christians have their own scriptures both groups have corrupted the original messages God gave to them, and instead of following God's path they follow their own ideas. Therefore, if Muslims follow the Jews and Christians against their own scripture it means that they are being misled. Sha'rāwī used the verse to illustrate that Muslims should not follow any path laid out by human beings.[118] It is clear that Sha'rāwī's interpretation is not only against Muslims following the lead of Jews and Christians, but is also against accepting the decisions of the Egyptian government if they contravene the Qur'an. Additionally, we can see this interpretation as indicating a new, more politically independent stage of Sha'rāwī's life, one in which, because of his popularity among the people as a moderate preacher, he no longer needed to capitulate to the government.

According to Shaykh Sha'rāwī in his memoirs after he made the above assertions, the Israeli Ambassador in Cairo, along with some unspecified Americans, asked President Sadat to "shut that man up," which Sadat refused to do.[119] This story is told in great detail in Sha'rāwī's memoirs and is repeated a number of times because it is used to restore his credibility as an independent Islamic thinker, one more concerned about eternal truth than about political expediency. It is important as a counter to the criticism sometimes made of Sha'rāwī that because of his closeness to the government during the time of Sadat, especially his time as Minister of Religious Endowments, he capitulated to many of Sadat's wrong or anti-Islamic ideas. Additionally, in the story Sadat told the

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[118] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Khawāṭir Faḍīla Shaykh Tafsīr al-Sha'rāwī (*Cairo: Akhbār al-Yom, 1999, volume 1), pp. 576-577.

[119] *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīṃah,* the story is repeated this way throughout the book.

Israeli ambassador that because Sha‘rāwī was speaking from his wealth of religious knowledge, he would not ask him to shut up. Thus, according to the account given in his memoirs, it was because of Sha‘rāwī's popularity among the people as a religious leader that Sadat could not question his opinions without calling his own legitimacy into question. Clearly, it is impossible to claim that Shaykh Sha‘rāwī had no political relevance. As some scholars are wan to do. After he left official government employ, Sha‘rāwī spoke out against the government on religious grounds and suffered no consequences for it.

Sha‘rāwī's views have been mistakenly characterized as leading to violence and even the assassination of Sadat. It is important here to recognize the errancy of assuming that political disagreements, made through religious statements, necessarily lead to radical behavior among Muslims. Furthermore, Sha‘rāwī was very clear in his memoirs that even though he disagreed with Sadat, he did not advocate for his assassination and was against forcing political change in general. No one I spoke to ever perceived Sha‘rāwī as a person who used his popularity for direct political influence. Instead he was fulfilling his role as interpreter of the Qur'an, which included reacting to and formulating opinions about political situations based on that interpretation.

Sha‘rāwī also spoke out about incidents that were related to internal Egyptian politics. In 1989 Sha‘rāwī was the head of a group of diverse ‘ulamā’ who publicly stated their opposition to the violent tactics of Egyptian jihadi groups. In 1993, a group of ‘ulamā’ calling themselves the "Mediation Committee" published a statement not only

condemning the violence of the jihadi groups but also opposing their severe treatment by the government, and offering themselves as mediators to help resolve the problem. Forty-one shaykhs signed onto the document including three of the most famous alim-preachers of the day; Shaykh Sha‘rāwī, Muḥammad Ghazālī and ‘Abd al-Hamīd Kishk.[120]

One of the most interesting political moments in Sha‘rāwī's career came when he spoke publicly to Egyptian President Husni Mubarak after a failed assassination attempt against the latter in Addis Adaba in June1995. Upon Mubarak's return to Cairo an official celebration was organized and televised throughout Egypt. At this celebration various important religious representatives spoke to Mubarak in what was supposed to be a congratulatory tone. These people included the head of Al-Azhar, Shaykh Jad al-Haqq, the popular ‘alim-preacher Muḥammad Ghazālī, the Coptic Pope Baba Shenouda, and Shaykh Sha‘rāwī. It was all orchestrated to show Mubarak as the beloved President of all Egyptians and to portray a sense of relief that the assassins had failed. Egyptians generally hold President Mubarak in great disdain. The celebration was meant to present Mubarak as a good, perhaps even godly, man, by showing that he was supported by the most influential religious leaders of the day.

The speech Sha‘rāwī made that day is still talked about and referenced in Cairo, more than a decade later. Its continued popularity is largely due to the technology that has allowed it to be continually sent from cell phone to cell phone and from computer to

[120] Zeghal, Malika, "Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulama of al-Azhar, Radical Islam, and the State (1952-94)," *International Journal of Middle Studies* 31, 3 (August 1999): pp. 380-390.

computer. It is also the most popular Youtube video of Shaykh Sha'rāwī. Many residents of Cairo have seen this video and one woman even showed it to me on her cell phone telling me that people at work had sent her a copy of it. Lines from the speech have been repeated in songs and even in a play, which was performed at the National Theatre in Cairo in the summer of 2008. Even though people who hear these excerpts often do not know the origin of the words, they are still recognizable on their own, even out of context. The message obviously resonated, and continues to resonate, with many Egyptians.

The popularity of Sha'rāwī's speech to Mubarak that day demonstrates what his son 'Abdul Raḥīm told me- that his father had spoken to the President for the people in a way that no one else in Egypt could. Sha'rāwī began his speech:

> "Mr. President, I have reached the end of my life. I am [ready] to receive my death as appointed by God. I do not want to end my life in hypocrisy (*nafāq)*. But instead I will say a brief word from my entire nation."

From the very beginning Shaykh Sha'rāwī made it clear that he spoke for the Egyptian people, who cannot themselves express dissatisfaction with the government unless they are willing to endanger themselves and possibly their families. He went on:

> " Our government is [comprised of] parties and oppositions and men and [ordinary] people all of whom, I am afraid to say, are inactive (*salbī*). I want them to know that dominion (*al-mulk)* is in the hands of God. He gives it to whomever he wills. The people cannot conspire to attain it, and it cannot be achieved (*wasūl*) by deception. God, blessed and most high, narrates (in the Qur'an) a dialogue between Abraham and Nimrod[121] and during this conversation what did Nimrod say to Abraham? He disputed with Abraham over their differences concerning God [saying]: If dominion comes from God

[121] The Qur'an (2: 258) does not specify whom Abraham disputed with.

> and I am an unbeliever (*kāfir*), then (why) did God give me dominion?
> Abraham said: 'He gives dominion to whomever he wills.' No one can conspire against God to receive possessions. No one can conspire against God to rule. No one will ever rule in the dominion of God unless God desires (*marād*) it. If the ruler is just surely he will benefit (himself and the people) with his justice. If he is unfair- unjust – he spreads injustice and makes it repulsive in the souls of all the people. They hate all unjust people even those who are not the ruler himself. Therefore I say to the people…. We, praise God, assure ourselves of the truthfulness of God's words [when he speaks] about what results from misdeeds (*āḥādth*).
> How shall we interpret it when God says: 'They plotted (*yamkaruna*) and God plotted' (Qur'an, 3:54). And how shall we interpret 'They conspire against God and we conspire against them' (Qur'an 86:15)? God wants to prove his self-sufficiency to his creatures. I advise anyone whose inheritance it is to be a ruler, not to pursuit it (rule), it must pursue him. For as the Prophet said, 'Whoever is pursued by something, he will be supported by God. Whoever pursues a thing, will not be able to manage what he pursued.'
> Oh Mr. President, the last thing I would like to say to you, as this might be our last meeting, is: if you are our destiny then may God lead you to the right path. If we are your destiny then may God help you bear your burden."[122]

Only someone of Shaykh Sha'rāwī's stature as a popular 'alim preacher could have stood on television in front of the entire nation on such an occasion and spoken these words directly to Husni Mubarak. People in Egypt have been arrested for less and even Sha'rāwī seems nervous in the video, almost fainting as he walks away from the President. With this speech Sha'rāwī was sending a message to the people of Egypt as much as he was sending one to Mubarak. He was telling them both that although Mubarak does not rule as a godly ruler, God still wills that he rule and no human plotting can change that. Yet in spite of this seemingly passive stance, Egyptians still overwhelmingly identify with the speech. Part of the reason is because Sha'rāwī informed Mubarak of the anger of the

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[122]"Shaykh Sha'rawi" July, 2009; available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGEEIn_Cpi4&feature=PlayList&p=56DAB157FC3C8344&playnext=1&index=31.

people, for the people, almost as a warning. He also equated Mubarak with Nimrod, an unbelieving ruler in the Qur'an, informing him, and the nation, that even though a ruler seems invincible while he is on earth, he will still answer to God after he dies.

Some might wonder why Sha'rāwī's subtle admonition would concern the President, or excite the people, who were essentially being told they can do nothing until God provides an opening. Mubarak's anger over the speech can be attributed to the threats he faced from those, like the Muslim Brotherhood and even more extreme jihadi groups, who questioned his legitimacy to rule a Muslim majority nation. The Brotherhood focuses on his refusal to impose sharī'a and his capitulations to America and Israel. As stated above the reason the government gave Sha'rāwī his own weekly television program, and the reason Mubarak invited him to speak in 1995, was to provide religious legitimacy to the regime in their attempt to counter these very criticisms. Sha'rāwī refused this role and instead chose to present Mubarak as a ruler equivalent to Nimrod, an unbeliever condemned by the Qur'an.

In addition he spoke from his wealth of interpretive knowledge as a representative of religious authority. Egyptians who listen to, watch, and repeat this message have told me that what Sha'rāwī did was to speak truth to power. He spoke as a man of religious knowledge, an 'alim, who despite the danger to himself, questioned the legitimacy of the President in religious terms, directly referencing God. Shaykh Sha'rāwī was not advocating for activism, he was still cautioning a politically powerless people against direct action. But while he was not calling the people to revolt, he was telling Mubarak

that God does not sanction his rule. This admonition is what reaches the people and it is what they respond to.

With the speech Sha‘rāwī also refocused the political in light of the eternal. This is especially evident in his statement, “We, praise God, assure ourselves of the truthfulness of God’s words (when he speaks) about what results from misdeeds (*āhadth*).” Since Muslims believe that God will judge all of humanity at the end of time it is clear that Sha‘rāwī was suggesting that President Mubarak will be held accountable to God for his misdeeds. As was typical of Sha‘rāwī his involvement in politics comprised reinterpreting the political in terms of theological truth, which, because he was an ‘alim preacher, one associated with holiness, was momentous for the people of Egypt in this situation.

Sha‘rāwī’s ability to insist that contingencies were secondary to God’s purposes in a way which resonated with the people, Sha‘rāwī demonstrated his political relevance even as he urged the people to leave retribution in the hands of God. He established his social relevance in the same way. One of the main goals of Sha‘rāwī was to aid in establishing Islamic values and behavior throughout Egyptian society by offering “advice” to people desiring to lead a more religious life. Sha‘rāwī always emphasized that forcing people to comply with religious edicts defeats the purpose of following those edicts. His style instead was to focus on the greater benefit of proper religious comportment instead of on the behavior itself; he never presented correct action as if it was the final goal. We saw this in the last chapter with the example of the movie star who consulted him for advice

and who decided to leave her profession, not because Sha'rāwī told her it was un-Islamic but because he gently admonished her, focusing on the primacy of God's system.

In addition, Sha'rāwī's belief that all Muslim women should wear the hijab (head scarf) in public led him to encourage the production of beautiful scarves for the purpose of easing women's way into religious behavior. The following story was told to me by Sha'rāwī's son when I asked him what long term influence Sha'rāwī had had on Egyptian society; it is also meant to illustrate Sha'rāwī's gentle style. During Sha'rāwī's time as a preacher he went to a man he knew who was a shoe producer in Alexandria and said to him, "'Muḥammad I want you to produce beautiful Islamic clothing for women in bright beautiful colors so that they will love hijab.'" The man protested telling Sha'rāwī that he was merely a shoe specialist, but Sha'rāwī insisted and eventually his friend complied. The shoemaker went on to become one of the largest Egyptian manufacturers of *muhajibat*, religiously sanctioned clothing for women, specializing in suits and the production of scarves with beautiful colors.[123] While it is hard to authenticate whether this was the first instance of colorful scarf production for women, the proliferation and variation of colorful eye catching scarves can be seen everywhere in Cairo today, especially among young women. More importantly the story is meant to illustrate how Sha'rāwī inspired increased adherence to religious rules by presenting the right behavior in a manner that directly addressed the concerns of the people, in order to help them overcome these concerns.[124]

[123] 'Abd al- Raḥīm al-Sha'rāwī, Sha'rāwi Center, Cairo, Egypt, July 2008.
[124] "It is impossible for the one who calls to Islam (to succeed) if he proposes to the people that they leave what they are used to by a method which (will lead them to) hate it the method itself. For the person who

While not much has been written on the subject of Muslim women and the head scarf that portrays the practice as moderate, when seen in the context of the social forces Sha'rāwī mediated between- those advocating for Western style dress for women and those calling for stricter veiling norms- it's clear that he came up with a compromise. There has been much scholarly attention paid to the subject of Muslim women and the "veil", so I will not engage in speculation on this phenomenon here.[125] I will instead present some of Sha'rāwī's ideas about women's modesty and the question of equality in the context of how he engaged in this debate in his time and place. The following passage illustrates his opinion of women's modesty in the context of his greater concern for proper adherence to Quranic norms:

> "The [women's] dress itself is not to be embellished (zīṇat) and this is known from the saying: "And do not display their beauty and ornaments" (Qur'an 24:31) and God says: "And abide quietly in your homes, and do not flaunt your charms as they used to flaunt them in the old days of pagan ignorance." (Qur'an 33:33) If a woman wears perfume she is flaunting her charms (zīna). Also a woman is not like a man, in dress she should not be like a man. So [a Muslim woman] should not dress like the unbelieving women, because many Quranic verses demand that she not follow the ways of the unbelievers. For this same reason a women should not dress to [enhance her] notoriety. Our prophet has said, 'whoever dresses for notoriety in this world God will dress him in humiliation on judgment day and then throw him into the fire.'"[126]

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calls to guidance knows that to call by a hated method makes the people suffer two hardships. The first hardship is exhausting the people by (telling them) to leave what they are used to. The second hardship is exhausting the method which leads to the new." Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fi Tarbiyyati al-Insān*, p. 33.

[125] For important discussions about this topic as it relates to Egypt see Lila Abu-Lughod, "Movie Stars and Islamic Moralism in Egypt," *Social Text* 42 (Spring 1995): pp. 53-67, Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), especially chapter 8, and Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd, "Polemics on the Modesty and Segregation of Women in Contemporary Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, No. 1 (Feb., 1987): pp. 23-50, to name a few.

[126] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Al-Fatāwa* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfīqiyya, 1989), pp. 415-419.

For Sha'rāwī all knowledge about proper Muslim behavior comes from God's revelation, either the Qur'an or the ḥadīth. As we explored above, believers are not to follow unbelievers if that means contravening the message God has given to Muslims. If there is a conflict between human desires and God's commands for humanity, then human beings must refine themselves and keep their desires in check. We are living for the next world and not for this world only. According to Sha'rāwī Islam came to refine the instincts (*al-gharīza*) of the believer in order to protect the human being from that which would corrupt the instincts, but Islam did not come to erase the instincts.[127] What the believer is learning to do on earth is to control her inclinations and follow God's decree. In this way for Sha'rāwī the Qur'an is very clear that women need to cover their beauty. The only discourse he sees as countering this knowledge is what has come from outside of the believing community and therefore it is not applicable. Although he does engage what he perceives to be an external threat, he does not engage it on its own terms but in light of the Qur'an.

To comment more generally on the complexity of women's choices in Egypt today, the choice to dress according to Quranic norms signifies something more than an act of piety or return to a religious ideal. The decision of so many women to wear hijab, or even now to wear *niqab,*[128] must be examined in the context of Egyptian society as a whole. This discussion is less about public behavior and more about finding an answer to

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[127] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Al-Fatāwa*, p. 412.

[128] In Egypt *niqab* refers to the black covering that extends from head to toe, including the covering of the face, leaving only the eyes showing. Some women in Cairo even wear black gloves and/or cover their eyes with mesh.

the particular question: How does a believer decide what is proper religious behavior in the face of so many choices? This question did not arise with such ferocity before the discourse about the liberation of Muslim women, one heavily influenced by Western logic, began. The viewpoint of Shaykh Sha‘rāwī is effective because it answers this question in reference to a greater truth. As an authoritative spokesman he offers his view of God's intentions. He refocused the discussion and returned it to the ultimate goods of the religion, whatever one might think of his opinion or its effects.

Lila Abu-Lughod has argued that in speaking of issues like women's dress and the equality of women and men, we must be aware of the historical connections this discourse has to colonialism and missionary activity. What we need to develop is an alternative discourse based on an understanding of how women differ throughout the world.[129] Furthermore, Saba Mahmood has explored why Muslim women's involvement in contemporary Islamic movements directly contradicts feminist theories of equality and liberation. Women in present day Islamic movements have concepts of "self, moral agency and discipline" that actually fit within what might be called patriarchal religious systems. Therefore it is not correct to view women involved in these movements (or women choosing to cover themselves to express their faith) as seeking "freedom from relations of domination" but instead we should find ways of defining their moral agency within these relations.[130] I would like to extend this type of inquiry and ask how the

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[129] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?," *American Anthropologist,* 104, 3 (September 2002): 783-794.
[130] Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, 2 (2001): pp. 202-235.

ways in which women within Egypt have responded to Shaykh Sha‘rāwī, as evidenced by things like the increased presence of head scarves and Islamic dress, resonate with their own views of what it means to be Muslim women in the contemporary world. Why do they still take advice from Sha‘rāwī, as an interpreter of religious knowledge, if he is speaking from the viewpoint of male dominance?

Women in Egypt today are increasingly in a position to choose whether or not to take religious advice and who to take it from (his son and disciples often stressed to me that what Sha‘rāwī offered was "advice" about religious matters not orders). Eygptian women have an increased sense of agency in deciding which religious behavior they willingly participate in. This does not discount the social pressures they face if they do not adhere to certain dress codes; those pressures do exist. Religiously speaking, however, it is often women themselves who decide how to dress as an individual expression of faith. Also women are getting advice about issues such as proper dress from many sources and increasingly in a ways that speak directly to them. Take, for example, how women receive Sha‘rāwī's advice. Because his sermons were filmed in front of male only audiences, we could view Sha‘rāwī's discourse about women's dress as objectifying women. By transmitting his message on television, Sha‘rāwī actually allowed greater access for women because he spoke directly to them in their own homes. If we assume that women are repressed by their religion, and subordinated by male representatives of their religion, then we disregard the ways in which women do engage in and control their own agency within the system.

In Sha‘rāwī’s discourse on women we also see the beginnings of a very subtle accommodation. He poses his concerns about the well being of women, not as an issue about correct action, but as a means to help women relate in their present circumstances to the revelation. He does not focus on this issue solely because women are the objects of this concern but also because women are themselves seeking answers. While he advocates that women should keep to their roles inside the home, one can’t help but also notice that Sha‘rāwī is expressing a specific kind of concern for women. According to him, his purpose is not to relegate women to a lower status but to see them fulfill their duties as proper Muslims according to the highest status, the one God has laid out for them which will also ensure them a happy life in this world and in the hereafter.[131] For Sha‘rāwī these duties, like modest dress for women, are proper because they are suitable. God ordains what is best, human beings do not need to question it, but should simply try to understand and live by those commands.

The following story, told to me by Sha‘rāwī’s son, Abd al-Raḥīm al- Sha‘rāwī, further exemplifies Sha‘rāwī’s concern for what proper comportment means to the individual female and not just to the society as a whole. One day when Shaykh Sha‘rāwī was visiting his son and his son’s family his young granddaughter came into the house wearing hijab and Sha‘rāwī did not recognize her. He asked his daughter-in-law why she was making her daughter wear hijab to which she replied that even though her daughter was only ten years old her body was developed and therefore she must cover. Sha‘rāwī

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[131] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha‘rāwī, *Al-Fatāwa*, pp. 473-475.

proceeded to ask her how her daughter will be able play with her friends with such restrictions, informing her that he was opposed to her decision to make her daughter wear hijab at such a young age. He also told her that every one must live according to their stage in life, the child must enjoy the stage of childhood in order not to be conflicted in her personality later on.[132] Even in choosing to dress modestly and fulfill ones duties, an individual needs to conform first of all to God's sanctions. Even though the stated purpose is to cover the beauty or adornments of women it is not for the human being to decide its appropriateness.

The final significant development to consider in recounting of Sha'rāwī's life actually began after his death. Every year on the anniversary of Shaykh Sha'rāwī's death in June there is a festival, in Daqadous, which resembles the popular Sufi moulids of Egypt.[133] People come to Daqadous for a couple of days and celebrate day and night around Sha'rāwī's grave with carnival rides, special food and events. When I asked Shaykh Sha'rāwī's son and disciple, 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, about the moulid in Daqadous I was told that it wasn't really a moulid but a *dhikr*, a commemoration. 'Abd al-Ra'ūf said that Shaykh Sha'rāwī had specifically asked that no moulid take place at his grave, which is probably why it occurs on the date of his death and not the usual day of birth. But

[132] 'Abd al- Raḥīm al-Sha'rāwī, Sha'rāwī Center, Cairo, Egypt, June 2008.
[133] Moulids are festivals held at the graves of saints usually on the date of their births. For information on moulids in Egypt today see Valerie Hoffman *Sufi saints and Mystics in Modern Egypt* (Columbia: Univeristy of South Carolina Press, 1995), esp. pp. 107-117 and Julian Johansen, *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt: The Battle for Islamic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). For information on medieval performances see Jonathan Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority* and Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*. For the yearly festival in Daqadous see: Samuli Schielke, *"Pious Fun at Saint's Festivals in Modern Egypt"* ISIM Newsletter, Netherlands, 8/01, p. 23.

Engineer ʻAbdul Raḥīm, who represents Shaykh Shaʻrāwī in the village of Daqadous, told me that the festival benefits the people of Daqadous economically which is a great help to them and for that reason Shaykh Shaʻrāwī would have approved of it.[134] I was also told that during this commemoration people come from all over Egypt and scholars give lectures about Shaʻrāwī and the important aspects of his teachings in order to provide guidance to the people who attend the celebration. All of these statements downplay the connection between this commemoration and traditional moulids, which entail visiting the graves of saints, a practice that is controversial in Egypt and throughout the Muslim world today. Nevertheless, whatever the intentions of those who instituted the celebration, it is clear form the description of the event that it is a moulid in all but name.

People's discomfort with associating Shaʻrāwī with controversial Sufi practices and rituals[135] reflects the fact that the Sufis have come under fire from both the learned modernists, beginning with Muḥammad ʻAbduh, and the Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, for being backwards, superstitious and in some cases un-Islamic.[136] The controversy is based on the fact that those who visit the graves of saints often ask the dead saint to intervene between themselves and God, thus attributing a divine power to something other than God. In addition, since the visiting of tombs is particularly

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[134] ʻAbd al- Raḥīm al-Shaʻrāwī, Shaʻrāwi Center, Cairo, Egypt, July 2008.

[135] I will deal more fully with Shaʻrāwī's connection to Sufism and his use of Sufi ideas in chapter 5.

[136] For modernist critiques and an explanation of how they have been split into different types of critiques, see Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*.

important to women who often mix with men in socially taboo ways during moulids, participants open themselves up to accusations of immorality.[137]

As a result some Sufi revivalists have taken an intermediary position between condemning moulids and grave visitations completely and permitting all manner of activity associated with them. In continuing the Sufi revival of the pre-modern Islam (see chapter 1) contemporary Egyptian Sufi reformers focus on what is best for the whole Muslim community rather than emphasizing the importance of one particular Sufi order. They also underscore the need to revive Sufism so that it can become the vehicle for the implementation of Islamic renewal in general. One Sufi reformer, Shaykh Muḥammad Zaki Ibraḥīm, condemned certain practices associated with moulids such as the mixing of men and women, the use of music and other practices he considered deviant, but did not condemn the visitation of saints' tombs outright. The visiting of the tombs of saints is understood generally to "renew" the believer and to bring together the "sacred" with "daily life."[138] The goals of the modern revival also concern social activity, with the aim of increasing both the welfare and the piety of the community as a whole.[139] In addition, tomb visitation was considered by Zaki al-Raḥīm as necessary for the protection of "faith, patriotism, nationalism, and high human values," all of which are thoroughly modern concerns.[140]

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[137] Valerie Hoffman, *Sufis, Mystics and Saints*, pp. 117-119.
[138] Valerie Hoffman, *Sufis, Mystics and Saints,* pp. 117-118
[139] Julian Johansen, *Sufi Reform in Modern Egypt,* p. 61.
[140] Valerie Hoffman, *Sufis, Mystics and Saints,* p. 118

Sha'rāwī's view of Sufism and his participation in Sufi ritual fit perfectly within this strain of revival. He did not disagree with any Sufi practices as long as they did not exceed the bounds of what was allowed in Islam. For example, he was not against the practice of visiting graves and was known to visit the graves of saints himself. He was especially fond of visiting the tomb of Ahmed al-Badawi, the famous Sufi saint of Tanta whose moulid is one of the largest in Egypt. I was also told that although Sha'rāwī did not belong to one particular Sufi order, he loved and respected all of the Sufi Shaykhs and they continue to love and respect him in return. Because of the love between them, each day of the commemoration given in Sha'rāwī's honor is organized by a different Sufi order whose representatives give edifying talks on that day.[141]

The fact that Sha'rāwī's disciples downplay his connection to Sufi ritual, such as visiting of the graves of saints, or especially the celebration that takes place around the day of his death, is a result of the criticism of their controversial aspects. It also represents a shift in how people view, and therefore understand, their participation in such rituals. I was told by Egyptians who held certain Sufi practices in distain that the visiting the graves of saints is acceptable behavior as long Muslims do not worship the saint or ask the saint to intervene between themselves and God. While visiting the graves of Sayyida Nafisa, the Prophet Muḥammad's great granddaughter, and Imam Hussein, his grandson, in Cairo, I was told that when Muslims come to these places it is proper for them recite the opening verse of the Qur'an only. It was also expressed to me that the

[141] Engineer 'Abd al- Raḥman, Sha'rāwī Center, Daqadous, Egypt, July 2008.

purpose of praying at the tombs is to show respect to the memory of the saints and to receive the special blessings associated with such respect. Visiting saints' tombs is so common in Egypt that it hardly requires any defense. In fact so many women come to the tomb of Sayyida Nafisa on Thursday evening it is nearly impossible to get close to the tomb itself. Those who defend the practice of grave visitation now demonstrate an awareness of the controversy, and have begun to adhere to a new, very self-conscious, understanding of what such rituals mean based on their reformulation.

In the contemporary Egyptian context there are sharp distinctions drawn between groups concerned with proper belief and practice, and those who search for supplementary types of religious participation. The first group tends to draw a distinct line between those they consider to be real Muslims and those they consider to be misguided or- in more extreme ideological terms- apostates. The second group does not condemn variations in religious practice, and often remain very attached to Sufi rituals as a supplement to more universal aspects of practice and belief. [142] This second position is an intermediary one because it capitulates to the criticisms of the first group but does not condemn every Sufi practice, instead allowing self-conscious participation in certain Sufi rituals. The intermediary position is the one that was publicly advocated by Sha'rāwī during his life and it is the one that has been communicated by his family and disciples after his death. As an 'alim, Sha'rāwī could not be seen as contravening any, now concretized, aspects of Islamic belief. Instead he has been presented as a holy man in a

[142] For more on this modern divide see: Elizabeth Sirriyeh, Sufis and Anti-Aufis: The Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World (Richmond: Cuzon, 1999.) , pp. 25-40.

general sense, accepting only what complements the basics of faith as they are understood today.

In addition, because there was never a clear divide between Sufis and the ‘ulamā’, different public personas usually reflect the different types of religious authority being represented more than they do an allegiance to one point of view in opposition to another. It is easy to see then why Shaykh Sha‘rāwī and his disciples and family, would try to present his public persona without reference to Sufi practice. His message was meant to be both inclusive and acceptable and his private affiliations therefore needed to be kept private. Sha‘rāwī was very clever in the way he spoke. He was careful not to alienate anyone or to offend political figures but to make criticisms in very subtle ways.[143] Sha‘rāwī’s cleverness with language enabled him to engage seemingly contradictory or even hostile viewpoints without ever sanctioning or condemning any one of them. One example of this was his continued involvement with Sufism even while he was an ‘alim in Saudi Arabia, a country that officially condemns Sufi practice and whose ‘ulamā’ are generally hostile to all forms of Sufi worship. This stance speaks as much to the overlap of different types of religious authority as it does to Sha‘rāwī’s particular ability keep a certain consistency in his public persona. Either way it is important to understand that his official status as an ‘alim was combined with his connection to esoteric beliefs and practices, to create the whole picture of him as *‘alim al-sha‘b*, the people’s preacher.

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[143] ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sha‘rāwī, Sha‘rāwi Center, Cairo, Egypt, July 2008. This sentiment was repeated as well by Engineer ‘Abd al-Raḥman.

➢ Conclusion

Shaykh Sha'rāwī was a popular preacher, one truly concerned with proper behavior and correct understanding. Yet he could not have functioned as effectively as he did in this role unless there were other elements supplementing his knowledge, qualities not gleaned from books but from a life lived in connection with God. Many stories that are repeated about Sha'rāwī by his followers, and by Egyptians in general, contain a combination of authoritative elements. This combination belies a clear division between different categories of authority and instead exemplifies how they compliment one another. It is clear that Sha'rāwī was understood to be both a man of knowledge and a holy personage.

To develop a more complete picture of the meaning of Sha'rāwī's life we must consider some of the common ways he was described by the people to whom he preached. I was told that the secret to why he was so well loved could be found in the following ḥadīth Qudsi:

> "Allah's Apostle said, 'If Allah loves a person, He calls Gabriel, saying, "Allah loves so and so, O Gabriel love him." So Gabriel would love him and then would make an announcement in the Heavens: "Allah has loved so and-so therefore you should love him also." So all the dwellers of the Heavens would love him, and then he is granted the pleasure of the people on the earth.'" [144]

According to this reference Sha'rāwī was loved by the people because he was loved by God. And God loved Sha'rāwī because "When God said do he did and when

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[144] "Fatḥ al-Bāri Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī," *Bukhari Ḥadīth* 8, 66 (2001).

God said don't he did not do, he obeyed the instructions of God."[145] He was also perceived to be very sincere and truthful in his speech and actions; he never told the people to do anything that he himself did not do. How he lived his life was important to the people who took advice from him.

As Ibn al-Jawzī's criticism of preaching shows, it is generally believed that proper preacher should live an upright life. For Sha'rāwī this included not just proper speech and behavior but living what he taught, or, in his own words, "the alignment of his heart with his actions," which for him was the very definition of sincerity. He engendered the trust of the people by demonstrating his attachment to God through his pious behavior and through the favors God bestowed on him.

Sincerity in Sha'rāwī's case was displayed through his godly behavior which was melded with his in deep/expansive knowledge of the Arabic language, to bring him both the accolades of his peers and the love of the people. In addition his knowledge and piety was accepted by the people he hoped to inspire, thereby making his influence among them effective. He had the knowledge to explain, the charisma to convey those explanations, and the insight into present circumstances to make them understandable.

Sha'rāwī had firsthand knowledge of the realities he incorporated into his lessons, but he also never lost sight of the goal of increasing devotion among his listeners. Instead he assimilated the finite to the infinite, which eventually, at the age of fifty-nine, he began to extol in his sermons. Shaykh Sha'rāwī insisted that worship begins with the individual's

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72 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sha'rāwī . Sha'rāwī Center, Cairo, Egypt, June 2008.

submission to the will of God and from there branches out to include the world in which she/he lives. This forms the first basic principle of his methodology: God is the source of all knowledge, but the human being, by following God's orders in all aspects of life, can help establish God's perfect system on earth.

Chapter Three

Renewal, Moderation and Fatwas for the Times

➢ Introduction

In this chapter we will investigate the concepts that form the foundation of Sha'rāwī's method of renewal. In the last chapter, we examined his life to discover how his personal history and its reception aided his authority among the people. Through looking at the details of his method we will begin to bridge the gap between experience and official communication by exploring the ways in which he applied the essential values he acquired during his lifetime to his message as a whole. One reason why Sha'rāwī's broadcasts were so well received was that he kept his admonitions comprehensible by relying on ideas that were easy to understand and that he repeated often, even when introducing new subjects. These intelligible concepts formed the methodological foundation of his overall program, on which he built his call for a more correct understanding of religion. Sha'rāwī method of renewal displayed his belief that his essential purpose as an 'alim-preacher was to reinterpret the revelation in light of what was needed for the believers of his time. This allowed him to employ the extensive effects of modernity to explicate the principle that all forms of knowledge and effort must be based on both the words of God and a true understanding of God's purposes for humanity. By using his sermons to articulate a new understanding of the incidentals of

his time, he also engaged the discourses of other modern Egyptian thinkers, many of who were also attempting to reconcile faith and modernity.

How did Shaykh Sha‘rāwī incorporate the concrete changes manifested throughout the twentieth century into the method and content of his exhortations while concomitantly evoking past ways of knowing and believing? Sha‘rāwī focused on the goal of summoning people back to an understanding of God's purposes by utilizing his personal interpretations of the Qur'an and Sunna, which informed his understanding of Islamic norms concerning belief and worship. His method of achieving this goal was based on foundational propositions that helped him adapt modern sensibilities to religious conviction. But he never wavered in his defense of the essentials of faith, even if it meant eventual rejection of new elements because they were potentially threatening to those essentials.

For Sha‘rāwī the purpose of life is inherent in the reason God created humanity and therefore the universe to sustain humanity, as expressed in the Quranic verse, -"I have not created human beings except to worship me" (51:56). However if he had only referenced Quranic verses without making them relevant he would not have had much influence among the people of Egypt. In order to enable his public to directly relate to the revelation, he used his own experiences, the particulars of his method of renewal, his understanding of what his audience brought with them to his sermons, and language from the past as well as from the prevailing discourses of the day. The overall concern of his *da‘wā,* summoning, and in this case preaching, was to reach the people, as they were in

that particular moment, in order to elucidate how they could fulfill the purposes of creation- the worship of God.

Shaykh Sha'rāwī's call for a renewal of faith among Muslims was distinctive in a number of ways. He did not establish (or join) a movement of renewal, one that would have allowed his method to continue after he died. The fact that he was the focal point for his message meant that his personality was at the center of his success, but his death also terminated this consequential aspect of his effectiveness. Acclimating more thoroughly to what modern reality necessitated may have ensured a more lasting influence for Sha'rāwī's moderate message. Limited acclimation in this case was due to the fact that Sha'rāwī understood his program to be thoroughly grounded in the tradition of tajdīd as I have defined it in chapter 1. Renewal, according to its historical manifestations, was not movement focused. In contrast revivalist and reform movements recently established in Egypt, which concentrate on instituting a return to Islamic values to ensure social and political changes, are thoroughly modern.[146] They are often reactions to secular governmental control over religious institutions.[147]

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[146] See footnote 10 in chapter 1 for an explanation of how I distinguish between the categories of renewal, reform and revival. These terms have become very confused in the literature on pre-modern modern Islam, because they are either used synonymously or without any recognized standard. (See Nehemia Levitzion and John Voll in their introduction to *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform* as an example.) Therefore my use of these terms in the modern context represents a way to begin to distinguish academic categories and do not necessarily reflect the way these terms are used (in their Arabic equivalents) by all of the various agents of change themselves. For the purposes of this dissertation I will maintain a distinction in the modern era between calls for renewal of tradition (purification when the community has gone astray undertaken by recognized agents of that tradition, essentially the 'ulamā') and the newer manifestations of reform (a general call for updating Islam, usually associated with those labeled "modernist" or "adaptionist") and revival (a call to invigorate and increase faithful devotion. This term is associated with various types of actors because of its broad appeal.) The way the last two types have manifested in the

By approaching religious responses to modernity through the study of discourse we can pinpoint differences and similarities between renewers, reformers and revivalists in order to gain a greater understanding of their perspectives. This will also prevent us from attempting to judge their authenticity, or from characterizing their distinctions in irreconcilable terms. While it is true that their distinctions should be kept clearly delineated this does not mean that in their modern manifestations the categories do not overlap. For example, all three categories can be associated with one or more well known ‘ulamā’ from the past, and even in the modern era there are ‘ulamā’ renewers whose programs overlap with those whom I label reformers and revivalists. Often agents can and do belong to more than one group, which makes the need to clarify the distinction even more crucial if we are to understand the differences between various calls for change. Furthermore, in the modern era it is not necessary to define the terms by the actors except in the case of renewal, given that as a theory it is historically attached to the ‘ulamā’ in the ways that I have explained in chapter 1. For instance, although a man like Sha‘rāwī was essentially a renewer, aspects of his program resembled reform mindedness (in the tradition of Muḥammad ‘Abduh) and a revivalist mentality (his call in

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modern era is new because they are open to diverse leadership depending on the particular group and their program. (We will discuss the circumstances that led to this type of formulation in chapter 4.)

[147] As Ira Lapidus says: “The contemporary Islamic movements are both a response to the conditions of modernity-to the centralization of state power and the development of capitalist economies-and a cultural expression of modernity. The emphasis upon Islamic values is not intended as a return to some past era but represents an effort to cope with contemporary problems by renewed commitment to the basic principles, though not the historical details, of Islam.” Ira Lapidus “Islamic Revival and Modernism,” p. 444. Lapidus clearly centers movements of revival in the modern era. Sha‘rāwī’s project was also essentially modern, in that he was responding to many of the same forces, yet he did not call for a “renewed commitment to basic principles.” Even though he recognized the importance of foundational principles he instead offered renewed interpretation in light of the source of those principles, God’s message in the Qur’an. For the changes instituted specifically by the Egyptian government see chapter 4.

general was one concerned with reinvigorating faith, again a very broad category). Yet just labeling him a reformer or revivalist without examining the specifics of his program in relation to these categories, limits our understanding of his full import.

Different types of actors rely on different types of authority, and, as we will explore throughout the dissertation, ‘ulamā’ authority, even in the contemporary era, often reflects a connection to past authoritative discourses (like renewal) and categories, to a lesser or greater extent depending on the program of any individual ‘alim. Again this points to the importance of considering both the content of the discourse and the surrounding circumstances of any religious agent as well as to their connection to religious formation in general. Thus we can allow for the possibility that any one reformer, revivalist or renewer can be associated with more than one category. In addition this helps differentiate between various traditionally trained actors without presenting contemporary Islamic ‘ulamā’ as unified in message and purpose, something particularly erroneous and misleading in the modern era[148]. Instead we need a framework for examining them individually, without attaching categorical inexactitudes to them.

Sha‘rāwī in particular focused primarily on finding new responses in the revelation, ones appropriate to the condition he was facing, and not on an idealized past form of behavior or worship, or even of history. He saw God as the ultimate source of renewal because God had miraculously placed necessary information for each era in the

[148] Among the Egyptian ‘ulamā’ alone you have men as diverse as Sha‘rāwī, and the blind Shaykh, Omar Abdul Raḥman, who lead the first attack against the World Trade Center in 1993, both being labeled as fundamentalists.

Qur'an, to be brought forth at the appropriate time. Therefore Sha'rāwī did not react to modern influences as if they solicited a previously unknown type of response, although he did understand specific modern contingencies as unprecedented. By not presenting his program of renewal as a set of formal prescriptions, Sha'rāwī was able to keep his message focused primarily on God's continual disclosure of knowledge to humanity through the Qur'an and ḥadīth. This conception identified his program as unending, although it was formulated in a particular time, not because he established a vehicle for its continuation, but because through it he attempted to connect past, present and future eras through the divine revelation. This call differs from other diverse voices present in the contemporary Islamic world that have introduced programs meant to represent an idealized vision of Islam, bringing that vision from the past and applying it to the present.

In this chapter, I will present a general framework for understanding Sha'rāwī as a twentieth century religious specialist who focused on calling Egyptians to the principles of Islamic faith. This framework is comprised of different parts that will be examined in terms of how the context is woven into the message in order to get a complete picture of the elements involved in religious dissemination today. We will begin by exploring the basic concepts that undergird his method, which was based upon the foundational belief that God has given humanity a blueprint for life in the revelation. His approach also consisted of the manner in which he chose to communicate his message, how he responded to the contemporary discourse about religion, and how he ensured that his message would flourish amongst the people. These aspects were all included in the basic

principles that constituted the foundation of his message: his belief that God controlled life but that human participation was also important, his project of renewal, his notion of the method of God, and his insistence on teaching that religion is never a burden on the human being. All of these principles were essential to the overall purpose of disseminating his message, and were included in his sermons to reinforce other aspects, which rested upon the understanding of these basic, often repeated, principles.

➢ Knowledge: Its Dissemination

This section will focus on the most important aspects of Shaykh Shaʻrāwī 's method: his approach to religious knowledge and how he chose to impart it to others. The cornerstone of his method was his insistence that obedience to God is of paramount importance and that human beings, by being obedient, implement God's system on earth. Shaʻrāwī believed that God placed a system for humanity to follow in the revelation and that by following this system each individual's relationship with all of existence benefits. This is a twist on the notion that religion is either to be followed exclusively in one's private life or in both the public and private life of the individual. What Shaʻrāwī was saying instead was that even though a person's religious life begins privately with her/his obedience, obedience has repercussions not only for herself but for society and even the universe as a whole. In answering a question concerning his opinion of the secularist idea that religion is between an individual and God Shaʻrāwī responded:

> "Who said that religion is a relationship between the human being and his lord only? Truly it is a relationship between a human being and his lord in order for his lord to

clarify for him his relationship with the reality of existence (al-*wujūd*) in which he lives.[149]

What is this reality of existence? It is comprised of all possible areas of contact between the individual Muslim and her/his surroundings, or, according to Shaykh Sha'rāwī, her/his freedom of movement in life including all of her actions and impulses (*ḥarakat fī al-ḥayāt*).[150] This was Sha'rāwī's definition and explanation of human free will, our life movements: what we independently choose to partake in according to our own volition. The idea that human beings possess independent volition in life forms the basis of Sha'rāwī's conception of the relationship between humanity and God, therefore it does not mean that we are autonomous. Instead Sha'rāwī informed his listeners that they could use their independent volition to live according to God's decrees or to disobey God, thus imbedding the concept in the notion of human responsibility towards God.[151]

The idea of independent volition for Sha'rāwī was also connected to the purpose of creation. Human beings acquired free will upon their creation because when God offered "the entrustment" (*al-amāna*) to the heavens and earth they refused and only

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[149] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, p. 80

[150] Translated literally the phrase *ḥarakat al- ḥayāti* means life movements. But Edward Lane in his *Arabic-English Lexicon*, (Volume 1, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1984) claims that *ḥarakat* can mean movement, or it can also signify that someone moves something, was in a state of motion, or put oneself in a state of motion (p. 553). He also states that *ḥayāt* can refer to life in general or it can signify, "the faculty of sensation and the faculty of intellect or everlasting life which one attains by that *ḥayāt* which is intelligence and knowledge." (p. 682) Taken together I will translate *ḥarakat al- ḥayāti* , in the sense that Sha'rāwī uses it and Lane explains it, to mean independent volition because in moving things or oneself the individual displays volition. We achieve this volition through the use our independent faculties of knowledge and sensation for the purposes of this life and the afterlife.

[151] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Al-Ghayb* (Al-Qāhira: Akhrār al-Yom, 1990), p. 27.

human beings and jinn accepted it.[152] For Sha'rāwī the entrustment was also reciprocal; it was given without witness to be returned when the one who entrusted it requests it back. Repaying God for this trust means serving God in prayer and thanking him; it means doing what God orders by following the system he has given to humanity. For Sha'rāwī the acceptance of the entrustment meant that human beings had to be given free will through independent volition because each individual must choose whether or not to follow God's orders. Sha'rāwī understood our freedom to obey God as equivalent to loving God because when we follow God willingly, we come to faith through love. It was for this that God created the entire universe.[153]

Sha'rāwī believed that God's intentions for humanity are not limited to saying prayers, paying zakā, performing Hajj and fasting during Ramadan (i.e. ritual obligations). It truth humanity's obligations only begin with those rituals. Believers must build the greater purposes of Islam upon those foundations:

> "What does worship mean? To follow him (God) in what he orders and in what he prohibits…But obedience in what he orders and prohibits are the basics. This is what the Prophet has said about it: 'Build Islam on the good.' The people, unfortunately, make the most important thing in Islam prayer and fasting and zakā and making Hajj …But this is not [the whole of] Islam, these are [only] the pillars… we build something else on [top of] it….We must know that Islam continues in every [instance of] independent volition in life (*ḥarakat fī al-ḥayāt*). God makes it necessary in saying: 'I placed you upon the earth and

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[152] The Qur'an 33:72 states: "Verily, We did offer the trust [of reason and volition] to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up- for, verily he has always been prone to be most wicked, most foolish." (Asad)

[153] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Al-Ghayb*, p. 28.

> settled you in it.' It means God wants you to make the earth thrive because you came to the universe (*al-kaūn*) it was designed for you."[154]

The orders and prohibitions of God are important, they are the foundation on which all proper worship depends, but it is what is built on top of that, what believers do in every moment of life, that represents the full meaning of Islam. That full meaning concerns the purposes of creation and humanity's responsibility to ensure that all elements of existence thrive. The emphasis is on the greater goal of realizing God's purpose in creating human beings and placing them in the earth, which depend foremost on obedience. In stating that existence depends on human independent volition, Sha'rāwī was also saying that God's system needs to be considered in every action we take. "Faith is saying and doing, training and perfecting and prostrating to the one who created the power of the human being."[155] The training of the human being is necessary and requires reaching towards perfection, so that she can make the right choices, even when the rules are not stipulated, in order to ensure the flourishing of the universe. For Sha'rāwī in order for the world to flourish "beauty" (*al-jamāl*) has to be established in the earth:

> "Justice is the scale of the merciful-why? Because truly the orders and restrictions (*ḥadūd*) of God are a scale of beauty (*mizān al-jamāl*) in the universe. If the human being is able to restrict his [own] goals by perfecting life in work and behavior then beauty spreads in the earth because the scale of justice (*mizān al-'adl*) is indeed set up. If the human being does not realize the goal of existence, ruination and great loss is the result."[156]

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[154] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīṃah* p. 83-84

[155] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fi Tarbīat al-Insān*: *Min Qaūl Shaykh Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, al-juz' al-thānī* (*Al-Qāhira: Wuzāra al-rāfā' 'idāra al-sha'ūn fara' al- sha'ūn al-dīnīa*), p. 27.

[156] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fi Tarbīat al-Insān*, p. 175.

God has given the law, or his orders and restrictions, because in following them the human being is able to establish God's justice. This entails human participation both in obedience and in restricting oneself when our own goals conflict with that obedience. The orders are not the goal, they are the means of getting to the goal, God's purpose in creation, which is worshipping God to establish the scale of beauty. God's desire for justice is present in the beginning and the end of human endeavor.

Sha'rāwī was constantly focusing his listeners on the great goals of existence; using free will to worship God by following God's method which clarifies humanities place in the universe.

> "The free will of the human being is a movement governed by the righteous method [of God] which is for the benefit of the human being himself. If one of the rules of the method is deficient or unsettled then harm will reach the whole society. The aesthetics (*jamālīāt)* of life is a type of harmonizing of the free will of the human being with the original cosmic beauty (*al-jamāl al-kaunī al-'aṣīl*) as it is related to the Creator of the universe."[157]

Human beings must be governed by God's method in order for harmony to exist in society. Sha'rāwī is again extending the basic idea of following the method for the good of society, by relating it to universal harmony and finally by connecting it directly to God's intentions in the creation itself. The method of God is complete and perfect but must be enacted by the individual so that she/he can receive benefit, thereby fulfilling the trust accepted by humanity at the beginning of creation.

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[157] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Rahīman fi Tarbīat al-Insān*, p. 198.

One of the features of Sha‘rāwī’s thought that distinguished him from many other twentieth century Muslim thinkers was his insistence that worship does not end, but begins, with the performance of duty, which changes the focus from human behavior to God, who is the source of all being. As Sha‘rāwi understood it, this was not a quietist or secularist stance; it is not that one should practice religion and forget about its implications in other aspects of life. Instead Sha‘rāwī was saying that knowing how to behave in every instance must be informed by a revealed source and not by human desires. It is about worshipping God through the perfection of purposes. God’s justice is not established in performing duties properly but in taking that foundation and applying it to all interactions, especially with other human beings.

For example, Shaykh Sha‘rāwī did not call for the sharī‘a to be instituted in Egypt, especially not the stricter *ḥudūd* laws. He insisted that cutting off a hand as a punishment for stealing can only be applied in a society where everyone has enough to feed himself and his family, i.e. where God’s justice has been established. In this opinion he referred back to a saying of Imam Ali Abu Talib (the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad) in which he said that stealing means taking something that is not yours only if you have enough to provide for yourself and your family. In a society where the sources of charity have been co-opted by the government and citizens walk about hungry *ḥudūd* laws cannot be applied.[158]

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[158] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha‘rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha‘rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, pp. 99-100.

In addition Sha'rāwī said that he agreed with the people of Egypt when they say: "It is better to be without the *ḥudūd* laws then to have the Ikhwan (the Muslim Brotherhood) ruling us." This is because the Muslim Brotherhood is focused on outcome and therefore they advocate forcing result. Sha'rāwī believed that the reason why the Muslim Brotherhood has failed to gain power in Egypt, even though it has been able to capture the minds of many people, is first and foremost because "what entered their minds were stories of governance, that is where they began the collapse."[159] Results are in the hands of God alone. It is for God to tell us how we should behave in life, or how to operate existence. Additionally, Sha'rāwī believed that secular political thought and religious thought come from different sources and therefore should not be mixed. Secular thought is derived from human minds, while religious thought is derived from God. Therefore religious scientists should only make judgments within their area of expertise and political specialists should only speak about what they know best.[160]

Sha'rāwī was of the opinion that groups like the Muslim Brotherhood don't understand these basic principles and instead focus on whatever outcome they can implement according to their desires, which for him was a sign of immaturity. In return these groups could offer a critique of Sha'rāwī's program by saying that it calls attention away from social and political problems and in doing so allows injustice to persist. In spite of this, Sha'rāwī insisted that human beings should "follow" the instructions of God

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[159] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, p. 43-44.
[160] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, p. 44.

and not be led by their own objectives; in a political context this meant that he was against forcing change. In his response to the question of how he viewed the agenda of *jihadi* movements he said:

> "I do not want governance to come for [the sake of] ruling alone. I say to them governance will come with peace-with peace ya habibi-the preference is for Islamic principles with Islamic allegiance if it is permissible. But it is forbidden to force the president out. Because throwing him out will cause great *fitna* (chaos)….I do not say that I rule by Islam but I say I want to be ruled by Islam."[161]

Muslims cannot institute God's laws if by doing so they break God's laws, Sha'rāwī was very clear about this. While he wanted to see, "Islamic principles with Islamic allegiance" he taught that there could be no such allegiance if some of God's laws were broken in order to establish and enforce these principles, because this strategy would go against God's method. In the revelation, God has given humanity instructions for every situation so it is not for people to decide how to implement change. For Sha'rāwī the method and the results both belong to God and both can be corrupted by improper means.

How does humanity know how to operate existence? In explaining God's instructions to humanity concerning existence, Sha'rāwī used the metaphor of a washing machine. The creator of a washing machine gives the owner an instruction booklet or a catalog, which explains how to operate the machine so that it will work properly. Just like a washing machine, creation has a purpose and a goal. In order to know how to function within existence human beings must discover these goals and purposes through

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[161] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, p. 52.

the catalog, the Qur'an and ḥadīth, which God, as the creator, has given to humanity. However, since the properties of life are fixed this discovery is to be accomplished with the mind. Humanity reads the catalog for instructions, but they must use their minds to understand those instructions.[162] In this metaphor Sha'rāwī limited the source of knowledge while reinforcing the role of the ulama as interpreters of revelation by virtue of the fact that the human mind, when it devises its own plans, can just as easily lead one away from following God's orders. Moreover, because of his belief that only religious specialists should be involved with religious thought, he delegated the interpretation of revelation as an exclusive function to the 'ulamā'.

Sha'rāwī saw his own role as one of helping his community understand God's catalog for humanity; giving his audience the specifics of how to train themselves so that they could use their independent volition to obey God. But he firmly rejected the notion that any of his thoughts originated anywhere except in the words of God. Through emphasizing that God's words are the only source of guidance for a believer, Shaykh Sha'rāwī categorized the source of all other thoughts as *bashari*, human or secular, and therefore as potentially offering mistaken religious guidance.[163] In setting forth his method for distinguishing truth from falsehood this way he dismissed all of the alternative discourses concerning religious knowledge, whether they be secular thought, governmental thought or Islamist thought, as belonging to the same mistaken ideology,

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[162] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, p. 48.

[163] See chapters 4 and 5 for more on Sha'rāwī 's theory of knowledge.

that of originating in human thought instead of with God. Sha'rāwī categorized such ideological groups as "ruling with Islam" instead of being "ruled by Islam," (*lā āḥkām bīslām, ūḥkam bīslām*) actively enforcing their own will instead of passively following the primary: God's will.

It also cannot escape our notice that in the quote above Sha'rāwī repeats the position that "chaos is worse than tyranny" a view held by some important Sunni ulama of the past, most notably Ibn Taymiyya. This opinion could be interpreted to signify the 'ulamā''s capitulation to power and therefore representative of an essentially pacifist stance. Yet we could just as easily state that Sha'rāwī was less concerned with power and more concerned with the source of inspiration: if only God's will can establish justice, then human endeavors to force out a ruler will necessarily end in tyranny. He is expressing a religious concern and in doing so he makes other types of discourse secondary. Sha'rāwī's also puts forth this past scholarly opinion by burying it in the context of the problems facing Egyptians in the late twentieth century. His reiteration of this opinion exemplifies another aspect of his method: applying foundational beliefs or opinions to the present context, which enabled him to renew past sources of knowledge for his community.

➯ Sha'rāwī's Theory of Renewal

Sha'rāwī 's insistence on renewal, as a part of his method, can be seen as a distinct product of the reality he lived as a scholar-preacher of the twentieth century and

in contrast to others ‘ulamā’ preachers. Some of the ideas behind his notions of renewal were not exclusive to Sha‘rāwī or to his era. His idea that the Qur’an and ḥadīth have to be engaged to formulate new laws as necessary is a case in point. Sha‘rāwī, and other preachers of the late 20th century, placed great emphasis on the unity of Islam above its various sects and divisions in order for the Muslims community (the umma) to again be united in a globalized world. Centering discourse on revelation and away from legal and doctrinal sources enables instruction to be directed towards the community as a whole. Continually looking to the Qur’an and ḥadīth for directives has been common among renewers and reformers alike. Other reform minded Egyptian ‘ulamā’, beginning with Muhammad ‘Abduh and continuing through Mahmud Shaltūt, emphasized the power of the Qur’an as a source which should not be limited by past interpretations. All of these ‘ulamā’ believed that the Qur’an’s potential as a constant guide was limited by exegetes and legal scholars who used sources external to the Qur’an to explicate its meaning and purposes. Furthermore, according to Sha‘rāwī, all human interpretations are limited by the knowledge of the interpreter who can only speak for his own time, which gives all interpretations a temporal relevancy whereas the Qu’ran itself can never be limited by the unfolding of history. Shaltūt and Sha‘rāwī, and many other reform-minded thinkers, were convinced that the Qur’an is capable of speaking to all questions that may arise, in any time or place,- from variations in belief to the legality of Muslim participation in everything from contemporary banking practices to certain medical procedures.[164] These

[164] Kate Zebiri, *Mahmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism* (New York: Clarendon Press of Oxford

reformers all lived through times of great change and understood the necessity of adaptation, yet none of them could imagine any situation arising that could not be judged and understood according to the Qur'an.

Sha'rāwī is distinguishable from other reformers of his time by the fact that his vision was not rejectionist; he did not negate projects of renewal that came before his time and he did not advocate unity for the purpose of cleansing Islam of its institutionalized faults. Instead he proposed that the Islamic system is perfect and therefore needs to be utilized to form a response to challenges as they arise. He saw his project as supplemental to what came before because it was appropriate for the present age just as previous projects were appropriate for their time. Hence Sha'rāwī believed that he could not follow what came before him and he did not begin to preach until he had something new to say.[165] Sha'rāwī 's notion of renewal is based on the idea that the Qur'an, as God's speech, does not have one fixed interpretation but is constantly present, revealing its eternal nature. Therefore every new interpretation can be correct even if it is not applicable to all times. To believe that the Qur'an has a fixed interpretation limits both the power of the Qur'an and God's power in sending it. Acknowledging the validity of previous interpretations affirms the Qur'an's limitlessness and its living quality. When interpreting a Quranic verse in a new way Sha'rāwī would begin by stating:

> "Let's look deeply at the story of the Queen of Sheba with the spirit of renewed understanding (*bi ruḥ al-fahm al mutajaddid*) and firm conviction as

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University Press, 1993), pp. 111-112. See chapter 6 for her explanation of Shaltūt's method of issuing fatwas.

[165] Interviews Abdul Raḥīm al-Sha'rāwī, Cairo, June 2008, and 'Abd al-Ra'ūf July 2008.

> God has given us some story or part of a narration with the goal that it (either the story or the narration) will provide us with a ripe lesson."[166]

The Qur'an will always provide a lesson for any new context if the believer is able to renew her understanding. Such a view maintains the active quality of revelation and puts the onus on the interpreter to find advice from the Qur'an in any given situation. Each interpretation is an opening for the appropriate moment. Often the Qur'an cannot reveal a particular meaning until such time as that meaning can be received, as is the case with the scientific knowledge it contains. Thus confirming that the Qur'an, as God's speech, can constantly reveal its secrets, which brings to mind the Sufi notion that the Qur'an has many levels beyond the obvious. Understanding the esoteric levels of the Qur'an, its secrets, reflects the spiritual level of the interpreter.

Sha'rāwī similarly believed that religious edicts (s. *fatwa,* pl. *fatāwa*) could be used to express a sense that Islamic laws are flexible in their application based on circumstances and interpretation. Academics involved in the study of Islam have recently begun to give attention to fatwa literature, because it represents both the workings of the law and the concerns of any one generation.[167] The fatwa incorporated both the continuation of legal norms and answers to the real life questions or, at the very least, questions a mufti (a Muslim legal authority capable of issuing fatwas) would have to have considered based on its relevance. Therefore academics have used the fatwa literature to highlight the

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[166] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fi Rarbiyyat al-Insān*, p. 40.

[167] See Wael Hallaq *A History of Islamic Legal Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphal State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), and Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick and Davis S. Powers, ed., *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

interaction between cultural and societal phenomena, and the law. While we need to be careful about how much cultural and social practice we read into fatwas, there is no doubt that they offer us insight into the concerns of the particular time and place in which they are issued, and into how muftis have sought to accommodate these realities in Islamic law and practice.

Before the modern era, the mufti had to follow specific rules. He was expected to possess in-depth knowledge of Islamic law, its procedures, sources and previous rulings, which he gained through a proper religious education. In addition the mufti was supposed to live an upright life, have an impeccable character and according to some be a qualified *mujtahid*. (A person capable of independent judgments.)[168] The mufti also contrasted with the *qad*i (judge) in that he was the one who was qualified to search the texts, revelatory and legal, to form new opinions. Therefore, he was centered in the world of the texts, but he also used real life situations to provide a purpose, and to direct the result, of the textual search.[169]

This focus on legal procedure as intrinsic to the role of the mufti has shifted in in Egypt in recent years. The emphasis has moved away from issuing fatwas as representations of the workings of jurisprudence towards issuing fatwas as a mechanismthrough which the 'ulamā' can compete with each other and with the new class

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[168] See chapter 1, footnote 15 for more references. Also see Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State* (The Netherlands: Brill, 1997).
[169] Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, pp. 6-10, he relies here on Brinkley Messick's, *Calligraphic State*, chapter 3.

of secularly educated intellectuals who articulate their own vision of Islam.[170] As a result of this new type of competition there is a definite desire among reformist ‘ulamā’ today to deemphasize the binding aspects of ritual behavior and belief, and to instead stress how those very rituals and beliefs are relevant and inclusive. Kate Zebiri, writing on the fatwas of Maḥmūd Shaltūt (head of Al-Azhar from 1958 until his death on 1963), claims that his fatwas often resembled admonitions rather than legal rulings in the strictest sense. Even though Shaltūt insisted that he did not follow one particular school of law or even the authority of past muftis, he was hesitant to move too far from previous edicts in favor of his own opinions. In contrast, Zebiri characterizes Shaykh Sha‘rāwī’s fatwas as "providing simple answers that do not refer to any sources."[171] Yet this characterization of his opinions omits important aspects of Shaykh Sha‘rāwī ’s authority and originality. His edicts were, like Shaltūt’s, based on the texts (Qur’an and ḥadīth) but they were also based on Shaykh Sha‘rāwī’s "thoughts" about the texts thereby illustrating his independence and acknowledging the possibility that his opinions were subject to change. In contrast other ‘ulamā’, like Shaltūt, were more concerned with past opinions especially in matters associated with worship thereby assigning these decisions a timeless quality.

Shaltūt, like Shaykh Sha‘rāwī, was an Azhari reformer in the style of Muḥammad ‘Abduh in that he emphasized the positive aspects of Islam and insisted on the need to go back to the Qur’an and Sunna to support this view. While Sha‘rāwī definitely agreed

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[170] Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, p. 29

[171] Kate Zebiri, *Mahmūd Shaltūt*, p.107. See chapters 5 and 6 for more on Shaltūt’s opinions about fatwas and fiqh.

with ‘Abduh and his disciple Rashid Riḍa on certain issues, for example the need to search the sources for opinions and the distaste for looking to only one school of law when formulating opinions, Sha‘rāwī 's program of renewal differed from ‘Abduh's in some important ways. ‘Abduh advocated for the use of reason and the idea of the common good (*maslaha*) so that he could search the Qur'an and Sunna for new laws that could reconcile Islam and modernity. He understood that because modernity presented so many unprecedented potential conflicts with an Islamic way of life, searching the Qur'an and Sunna would need to be supplemented by human reason. The basic principle of ‘Abduh, and of his disciple Rashid Rida, was that human reason correlates with revelation in matters concerning right and wrong. This led to their formulation that Islamic law and society could be reformed based on the notion of the public interest, which in turn led to a "utilitarian" reform program.[172] The trend away from past juridical literature in favor of finding all necessary guidance in the Qur'an and Sunna began with such ideas. This trend is today known as *salafī* (which refers to the pious ancestors) but it is represented by such a diverse cadre of contemporary actors (including the movement know as *salafiyya*) that it is difficult to call them all by one name.

‘Abduh, and especially Riḍa, dismissed the legal doctrines and rulings of the past jurists because they believed that these past formations of the law were the reason the law had become stagnant and "intolerable." In addition the legal texts of the past represented superfluous formulations, especially for average Muslims because they were so

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[172] Wael Hallaq, *History of Islamic Legal Theories*, chapter 6.

specialized and difficult to understand. In actuality, ‘Abduh and Riḍa maintained that everything that any Muslim needed to know was dealt with during the time of Muhammad and therefore could be found in the Qur’an and Sunna. So for Riḍa the “pure form of Islam” could be derived only from the Qur’an, and the Sunna, which included the consensus of the companions of Muhammad.[173] Riḍa also believed that although the Qur’an and Sunna supplied the basis of faith and worship for all times they did not provide answers to all civil problems. For this purpose the principle of *maslaha* (consideration of the public good) must be used as long as the outcome does not contradict the basic principles of faith.[174]

In distinction, as explored above, Sha‘rāwī considered all thought not derived from God’s word as *bashari*, derived from the human mind, and potentially flawed. ‘Abduh’s and Riḍa’s reliance on reason would not have been acceptable to him. Sha‘rāwī did not reject the use of reason, he understood that human formulations, especially when derived from logic, can help lead to correct Quranic understanding. Nevertheless Sha‘rāwī presumed that religious truth could be derived only from God, its source can not be the human mind. This is a crucial distinction, because with it Sha‘rāwī reoriented reform in the modern era away from the notion that past scriptural interpretations need to be abandoned and towards the notion that novel interpretations can constantly be discovered. While these ideas are not necessarily at odds, first position accentuates the

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[173] Wael Hallaq, *History of Islamic Legal Theories*, p. 215
[174] Wael Hallaq, *History of Islamic Legal Theories*, p. 217

correctness of current interpretations while the second centers on the perfection of scripture itself.

Furthermore, Shaykh Sha'rāwī 's program of renewal did not characterize the difference between *mu'amalat* (duties between people or civic duties) and *ibadat* (duties pertaining to worship) as one of flexibility verses fixedness, as many other modernists have. Instead, in his view both were given completely by Muḥammad, who received the verse "today we have perfected for you your religion" (Qur'an 5:3) before he died. For Sha'rāwī this piece of revelation signified that all aspects of religion, including the religious law, were completed by the time of Muḥammad's death.[175] Religion was completed not only for one time but for all times, because the revelation contains continually unfolding truth. Even Muḥammad understood that different situations required different prescriptions. During his lifetime he gave different answers to the same questions depending on the situation of the questioner and not simply which type of question was asked.[176] Therefore, as we will see further on in the chapter, Sha'rāwī did not shy away from issuing fatwas that presented variations on what were accepted procedures for worship. He did so by claiming that even though these variations were always present as acceptable forms of worship, they were not previously practiced.

While he agreed with the notion that all matters of faith were explicated during the time of Muhammad, Sha'rāwī did not understand his legal opinions as corrective but

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[175] Qur'an 5:3. The full translation of which is: "Today have I perfected your religious law for you, and have bestowed upon you the full measure of My blessings, and willed that self-surrender unto Me shall be your religion."

[176] Abd al-Ra'ūf, Ḥusaynī Square, lecture and question and answer session, Cairo, Egypt, June 2008.

as restorative. He did not see himself as one who issued original fatwas. That was the job of the Prophet, who clarified every religious issue not just for his time but for all times. For Sha'rāwī there was a difference between the fatwas of the Prophet and those of the 'ulamā' who came after him. Therefore, Sha'rāwī did not regard his rulings as new in the sense that they were correct and the opinions of past scholars were wrong. Instead, the aspects of law and faith that Sha'rāwī clarified were not emphasized or discovered in the past because they did not need to be.[177] While this approach does not differ completely with 'Abduh's and Riḍa's insistence that the legal rulings of past scholars need to be rethought, it is a method which presents an alternative way to break from those past rulings when they interfere with new understandings. Sha'rāwī 's alternative maintains a reliance on God's formulations because he insisted that God's knowledge was totally independent from humanity even though humans could search it for answers. 'Abduh and Riḍa offered a means of reconciliation between Islam and modernity by rejecting the unnecessary when it originated from sources external to the revelation and they advocated using human reason to do so.

Sha'rāwī 's program was focused on specific matters of faith, hence he did not call for changing aspects of the past that he believed did not need rethinking. What reformers choose to focus on and how they put forth their programs indicates their individual uniqueness as well as the long-term effectiveness of their method of revision. Sha'rāwī 's was not a total program of reform based on leaving aside past procedures and

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[177] Abd al-Ra'ūf, Ḥusaynī Square. lecture and question and answer session, Cairo, Egypt, July 2008.

knowledge, instead he saw himself as one who searched the Qur'an and Sunna to discover which aspects of disclosed knowledge were relevant to the present but were not yet utilized. According to Sha'rāwī, Muḥammad left no issue without a verdict, and each generation produces scholars who are capable of finding out what those verdicts are as the need arises, whether they concern matters of faith and worship or more mundane issues.[178] There is an interesting element of time and timelessness at play here. For Sha'rāwī the eternality of revelation means that it is not limited in application, but the formulations of human beings are, not because humanity progresses in knowledge, but because human opinions outlive their usefulness. For Riḍa and 'Abduh the Qur'an is timeless but only concerning the matters it speaks of directly, everything else is subject to change, and in order to derive a response from revelation, this change can come about through the use of reason.

Sha'rāwī 's method of deriving fatwas was also based on the notion that what is fixed is eternal and what is flexible translates into fluidity in human judgment according to the variety that naturally occurs in the lives of Muslims. Sha'rāwī saw his fatwas as explaining the authority of rulings because of their direct relation to the Qur'an and the Sunna. Thus demonstrating that Sha'rāwī was not only an 'alim, possessor of knowledge, he also relied on his individual ability to directly discern the revelation in order to clarify its rules for the population. This reminds us of Zebiri's critique above, that Sha'rāwī did not always back up his opinions with direct reference to the sources. For example

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[178] Chapters 4 and 5 go into detail about how new information is gleaned and the necessity of the 'ulamā' to the process.

Sha'rāwī often used his spiritual visions (*karāmāt*)[179] gained through his close relationship with God, to interpret the meaning of revelation. His ability to derive different interpretations from the Qur'an relied on his ability to find different levels of meaning in it. This even enabled him to update past understandings of basic elements of worship.

One example of this was Shaykh Sha'rāwī 's fatwa concerning whether or not Muslims should repeat hajj. In it Sha'rāwī said that Muslims who are planning to perform hajj a second (or third or fourth) time cannot do so if there are people in their communities who are starving. Instead they must give the money they would have spent on hajj in charity to the hungry. Even if they have already given zakā and fulfilled their duties according to the law, it is a priority to feed the starving over and above repeating hajj. Thus he took a ritual of worship, one usually considered recommended but not required, and said that it is only permissible when certain requirements are met. Sha'rāwī justified this ruling by saying that in the past repeating hajj was necessary because God loves to "see a crowd as it makes him proud before his angels."[180] Today because there are so many Muslims repeating hajj, he offered the evidence that seventy percent of people who go on hajj have done so before, there is no need to fear that there will not be enough people performing the ritual.[181]

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[179] See chapter 5, footnote 17.
[180] "From the ḥadīth about Hajj: God is proud in front of his angels because the crowds of people show how much his people love him. They come to Hajj asking for his mercy & forgiveness. So God says to his angels I hereby inform you that I have forgiven them. This is stated in all books of Ḥadīth (Abuab Al Hajj) and many other Ḥadīth books." E-mail correspondence with Shaykh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, March 2009.
33 Interview with 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, Cairo, July 2008.

In this fatwa Sha'rāwī used the situation to justify change, not as something completely original but as a way to offer a renewed understanding of what already existed based on shifting circumstance (in this case proven by statistics), thereby adapting ritual worship to novel conditions. Because Sha'rāwī's theology included the idea that God knows all past, present and future occurrences and that therefore God placed in the Qur'an and ḥadīth appropriate responses to all situations; for Sha'rāwī bringing forth a solution to a pressing problem (in this case the poverty caused in large part by the conditions of modernity) demonstrated the eternality of the revelation and the need for its constant reinterpretation by qualified agents. By feeding the hungry those looking to use their wealth for the satisfaction of God can do so in a way that is more relevant to their context.

Sha'rāwī 's ruling actually resembles 'Abduh's call for reform based on the idea of the public interest (*maslaha*). But in this case Sha'rāwī did not overrule a past legal prescription based on a prophetic utterance for the sake of the public interest. He first had to establish that the purpose of that ruling was no longer necessary, after which he used the idea of what was good for the community to issue a new ruling. He based this ruling on a renewed understanding of the intentions of scripture necessitated by changed circumstances not on a public need. Once this was established he made use of the idea of the common good to come up with an alternative. As an 'alim he could only use the concept of the common good if it was mitigated by something in the sources.[182] When

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[182] Qasim Zaman, *Public Islam and the Commom Good*, chapter 6.

conditions necessitate a revision of the rules of the sharī'a and new solutions need to be sought for the benefit of the community, an 'alim must still derive his decisions from what already exists in the Islamic sources and not from other places.

Sha'rāwī also did not shy away from coming up with a renewed understanding concerning forms of obligatory worship. In one case Sha'rāwī insisted that although there are five pillars in Islam not everyone is able to perform all of them at the time or place specified. For example, it is commonly known to Muslims that if one is ill (or for women if they are pregnant or menstruating), one does not need to fast during the month of Ramadan (for Sha'rāwī a "ritual of time") but can fast later in the year to make up for those missed days. Sha'rāwī took this a step further by saying that hajj (a "ritual of place") and zakā (another "ritual of time") are also not absolute because in prayer (a "ritual of time and place") all of the other pillars are performed. That is why when Muḥammad was given the specifics of prayer they came directly to him through Gabriel. The performance of the *shahada* (the basic profession of faith, "There is no God but God and Muhammad is his messenger.") is frequently repeated during prayer reaffirming the basic faith. In addition while praying, Muslims face Mecca, signifying a type of replacement for hajj. Also in prayer one sacrifices one's work time which is a type of zakā.[183] (Zakā literally means purification, i.e. sacrificing wealth for the purposes of

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[183] Interview with 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, uly 2008, Zamalek Cairo. Also Abd al-Ra'ūf, Ḥusaynī Square. lecture and question and answer session, Cairo, Egypt, July 2008.

purifying oneself and their possessions.[184]) Sha'rāwī offered a new understanding of prayer, one that portrays it as the only absolutely necessary pillar because it includes all of the others.

Again Sha'rāwī did not perceive this formulation as something which broke with the previous rules of religion. Muslims have always known that those who cannot afford to go to hajj or pay zakā do not partake in these obligations. Instead he combined past rulings with his means of interpretation to come up with a renewed ruling which reflected a concern for his audience, mostly poor urban Egyptians. He opened up the possibility of full participation in the pillars of worship for many in his audience who were too poor to perform them. Since one of the purposes of Sha'rāwī's preaching was to bring people back to the faith, he also wanted his audience to recognize their own lives in the basics of faith in order encourage full involvement in ritual obligation. It was part of his vocation as an 'alim preacher to reestablish the connection between the people and the tradition of participatory worship as a whole.

In this fatwa, we can also recognize Shaykh Sha'rāwī's tendency to distance himself from an emphasis on form in order to attempt to embrace the whole community for the sake of encouraging individual involvement and attachment to religion. He did not understand his task to be reestablishing proper behavior according to one particular vision of what that behavior entailed. Nor did he view it as completely releasing people

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[184] It can also signify, "religious service as a means of purification." Edward Lane in his *Arabic-English Lexicon,* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1984), p. 1240.

from their obligations. Instead he put forth a program of renewal meant to summon the people back to Islam through a focus on the individual application of what was suitable to the people he spoke to.

GodÕs prescribed method for humanity

While Sha'rāwī was concerned with proper religious behavior, he emphasized that living life according to Islam meant following the precepts of God's way (*manhaj allah*), which included more than ritual obligation. This "method" is the next aspect of Sha'rāwī 's method we will consider. Manhaj means a frequently traveled path, method or procedure, but it can also mean "a manifest, plainly apparent, or open road or way."[185] For Sha'rāwī, God's manhaj is a system of commands, which specify what humanity should "do and not do." But manhaj by definition also relies on past familiar, as well obvious, ways, or methods. This understanding of the word can also be seen in Sha'rāwī's formulation of *manhaj allah* as the uncomplicated, accessible method that God has provided for Muslims as a way of life for all times, through the revelation. [186] This is what I will refer to as God's prescribed method for believers.

The word manhaj entered the discourse of twentieth century Egyptian 'ulamā' initially through Rashid Riḍa and his teacher Muhammad 'Abduh. But in the late

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[185] "Manhaj," Edward Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Vol. 2, 1984, p. 2856.

[186] As is stated in the Qur'an 5:48:
"So judge between the followers of the earlier revelation in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high, and do not follow their errant views, forsaking the truth that has come to thee. Unto everyone of you we have appointed a [different] law and a different way of life (manhaj)." Sha'rāwī claimed that each religion has its own particular method, so when he uses the term he usually means it to apply specifically to the Islamic method. We will explore the difference between the universal and particular meaning later in the chapter.

twentieth century, it took on a new meaning as one of the central tenets of Sayyid Qutb's ideology. For Qutb God's method was the system of Islam:

> "Islam is a system (*manhaj*), a way of life, the practical life of humanity with all its components. It is a manhaj which includes the doctrinal conception…that explains the nature of 'existence' and defines the place of 'man' in that existence as it defines the goal of his human existence."[187]

In some ways Qutb's definition resembles Sha'rāwī's; they both understood God's method as a complete system, one that should be incorporated into the every day life of believers. But what is most interesting about Qutb's definition of manhaj, and the way it contrasts most with Shaykh Sha'rāwī 's meaning, is the fact that it never mentions God. It is not that God is absent; Qutb recognized that an essential aspect of God is his rule or sovereignty over all things.[188] QUutb even claimed, like Sha'rāwī, that God's intervention is a necessary prerequisite for any human movement.[189] But his idea of the divine rests on his notion of manhaj as a "divinely ordained science through which society can be constructed."[190] This science originates with God, but it is up to human beings as a group to enact it, which means that although God devised the system as a set of rules, the legislation of those rules is up to society. It is the human being who must take responsibility for society by constructing it in a way that allows God to be sovereign. Manhaj for Qutb is often equated with his notion of religion as a system or more accurately the system of Islam, the same one that took Muhammad thirteen years to

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[187]William E. Shepard, "Islam as a 'System' in the Later Writings of Sayyid Qutb," *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1 (Jan. 1989), p. 33.

[188] Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alim fi-l- Tariq,* (Cairo, 1990), pp. 10

[189] Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity*, p. 191.

[190] Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity*, p. 190.

establish in Mecca before being instituted in Medina. Qutb uses this concept of the systemization of religion to insist that it is necessary for Muslims to act.[191] If the purpose of life is to live according to Islam's system, then one must, like Muhammad, be actively engaged in making sure that the system is instituted.

For this reason Roxanne Euben, argues that Sayyid Qutb was basically a political thinker. Qutb's notions about Islam, refer to it as a concept embedded in the earliest Islamic community which he then extracts and applies to his notion of a perfect political or social system. Divine authority becomes a question of how that authority functions in the perfect society.[192] Qutb's concept of God's system was ideological in that it mixed religious and secular (philosophical and political) knowledge, to produce something concrete, which could then be applied to different situations. Qutb understood this palpable system as stable because he associated it with Muḥammad's method. Therefore, for Qutb, the method itself could not change. Although he allowed for flexibility, that flexibility depended on intellectual formulations of how to apply the system to new situations. But the system did not change, therefore Qutb's renderings of what the system entailed were not flexible, it was only a matter of how to take what had already been manifested and apply it to a new circumtance.

Also for Qutb, Islam as a system could not really exist until it was realized in social action.[193] Therefore, the system of Islam must be followed as a complete system or

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[191] William E. Shepard, "Islam as a 'System' in the Later Writings of Sayyid Qutb," pp. 36-37.
[192] Roxanne Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism, a Work of Comparative Political Theory*, p. 52.
[193] Roxanne Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*, p. 37.

else any Islamic society is *kufr* and not truly Islamic.[194] This dependence on human intellectual and worldly activity places a socio-political burden on individual Muslims and has been the inspiration for many types of renewal-oriented activity among Muslims in the late twentieth century. There is a sense of urgency in this type of ideology; truth must be established by the human being because there is great danger otherwise. Qutb appeals to a particular audience, modern educated youths who have been taught to understand religion as one system among many.[195] At the same time his ideology has incited many to violence because it makes human action the ultimate means to achieve their goal. Even when used for religious purposes, Qutb considered mobilization the highest form of activity, an idea that inspires ideological activity by referencing religious precepts.

Although Sha‘rāwī also used the word manhaj, he changed its meaning in his discourse by using it in the term *manhaj allah*, which as we saw means the method God prescribed for humanity. His was not an ideological formulation but one based on his understanding of the import of the Qur’an, and therefore it was more fluid. Sha‘rāwī stressed that although God’s method never changes human beings are never capable of knowing the full extent of that method and even Muhammad could not have instituted it completely because he only lived in one particular era.[196] In contrast, Qutb equated

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[194]See Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse*, pp. 204-205 and William E. Shepard, “Islam as a 'System' in the Later Writings of Sayyid Qutb,” pp. 31-50.

[195] See chapter 4.

[196] As we will see in Chapter 4, this difference directly effects the perception of ‘ulamā’ authority. If Islam as a system can be discerned exactly in history and only needs intellectual reformulation in each generation then those with the best rational minds are most suited to perform such a task. If instead the manhaj itself

manhaj with the religious system because of its relation to Muhammad and his institution of it in Medina. From that Qutb devised that only by reinstituting that system could perfection be achieved. But as we have seen Sha‘rāwī did not view the past and its relationship to the present, or the future, in this way. While religion was completed during Muhammad’s time, this did not mean that all of the possible situations to which it could be applied had already occurred. Different eras do not change God’s method, but they do require the discovery of new aspects of it through new applications. In this way the two thinkers were alike, they both believed that while method originates with God it requires human participation to come to fruition. For Qutb this required collective action because Islam as a system does not really exist until it is realized in social action. But for Sha‘rāwī human participation consisted of explication, instruction and/or application by individuals as members of society, using their freedom to choose God’s method. Thus they had very different understandings of how to make God’s method effective.

Furthermore, Qutb believed that the system of Islam must be followed as a complete system or else Islamic society would be unbelieving, which led to his call for an Islamic government. Sha‘rāwī did not think that enforcing proper performance of religious duty was what God intended. Instead he taught that God wanted believers to choose to be obedient out of love. Neither did he believe that those living in a country where Islamic laws were not enforced could not be fully believing Muslims and live according to the way of life God had set forth. He said the opposite, that as long as the

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needs discerning for each new generation according to the revelation then those trained as religious scientists must be engaged to search the revelation.

government did not force Muslims to drink alcohol and allowed them to pray, they could use their own volition to follow God's prescribed method. Actually Sha'rāwī saw a danger in depending on governments for religious enforcement, precisely because it takes the responsibility away from the believer.[197]

Moreover, according to Sha'rāwī, following God's prescribed method does not limit the freedom of humanity, it is what allows the human to be truly free because if it is followed by the entire society, corruption will not impede human movements: "God's method assigned the positive command 'do right' in order for creation to prosper…and 'don't do' so that creation would not be corrupted."[198] Because God gave humanity independent volition he also prescribed a clear method to guide humanity in life. Sha'rāwī explained God's method through a metaphor comparing it to a set of train tracks. Even though train tracks are laid down trains can still run when engineers want them to, from wherever to wherever, but the tracks keep accidents from happening. In the same way, and for the same purpose, God gave humanity limits to their freedom for the sake of their protection.[199] God supports those who believe because his method places borders around the extent of everyone's freedom, thereby providing safety and security for all.

The prescribed method is entrusted to the individual and to society. When God says "do not steal," this prohibition is not a limit on placed on the individual alone, but on

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[197] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, pp. 98-99.
[198] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī, *Min faīḍ al-Rahman fi Tarbīat al-Insān*, p. 11
[199] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Rahman fi Tarbīat al-Insān*, p. 12

everyone in the collective. So that while it seems that this rule is taking one's freedom away, when everyone complies with the rule it actually provides security. The prescribed method is the way in which true peace, justice and happiness is brought to humanity through every commandment. *Manhaj allah* also comprises a unified interdependent system because human beings must live in cooperation and in accord with God's commands if justice is to prevail. Hence, elucidating God's method was a central concern of Shaykh Sha'rāwī.

For Sha'rāwī God's manhaj ensures that God is always present because he is the origin of all action but also because only with God can human beings bring any act to fruition. Human beings can never force results against God's will. In discussing why Islam does not force people into submission Sha'rāwī says:

> "Islam does not carry the sword in order to force people to believe in it. As long as God is supporting (*shaḍa 'azra*) the believers in a group, then the group is supported by (*ta'wīd*) God's method (*manhaj allah*) [which] controls the freedom of the human being, (*ḥarakat al-insāni)*….So why would the raising of the sword be permitted? Surely [those who are] the best example and the best model and [who follow] the clearest way (*aslūb*) to God… they were all the soldiers of Islam. Concerning this God the blessed and most high has said: 'Say: The truth from you Lord: Let him who will believe, believe, and let him who will reject, reject. For the wrongdoers we have prepared a fire whose smoke and flame, like the walls and roof of a tent, will hem them in. " (Qur'an 18: 29)….In this way God (glorious and high) confirms his method. The truth is God's method leads to happiness in this life and the next and falsehood leads to the fire, which will surround the one who disbelieves in God (*al-kafir bil-haqq*) from all directions."[200]

Islam did not need actual soldiers for its acceptance to spread among unbelievers, it was established by those who served as examples in the way that they lived their lives

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[200] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fi Tarbiyyati al-Insān*, p. 21.

according to God prescribed method. Even when the Muslim armies conquered lands, no one was forced to convert. Only over time, Sha‘rāwī argued, when the conquered people saw the exemplars of God's way did they decide to become Muslims.[201] In order to combat unbelief Muslims must be supported by God, i.e. follow Gods method, because everything is in God's hands. What is absent here are the specifics of what it means to be a believer; Sha‘rāwī was not concerned with defining how one's actions indicate inclusion in the faith community. In addition, and more to the point, Sha‘rāwī reiterated the Islamic idea that those who do not accept Islam as a religious system can not be made to do so through compulsion, the punishment for the denial of God can only be meted out on the day of judgment.

Already in this basic definition we see that Sha‘rāwī has removed the sense that human beings need to enact God's method in order for God to stay in control. While human beings are responsible for following God's commands, and have been since the creation of Adam, God's method is not dependent on human beings. In one of his fatwas, Sha‘rāwī wrote about the difference between *the* method and *a* method he says:

> "What is the difference between the method (*al-manhaj*) and a method (*manhaj*)? The Qur'an came as a book (the method, *al-manhaj*). This means [that] it is the method (*al-manhaj*) and is unmatched and there is nothing except it. As far as [its role as] a book (a method, *manhaj*) is concerned it is correct that what is not in it is still with it. So the Qur'an, for those who believe, gave authority to the Prophet of God in what he legislated, so when he legislated, then it was by the Qur'an. God said: "What the Prophet has given you accept it

[201] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha‘rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fī Tarbiyyati al-Insān*, p. 21.

> and refrain from what he has forbidden" (Quran 59:7). This proves that he had special legislative power."[202]

It was very important for Shaykh Sha'rāwī to make a distinction between God's method, or *the* method, which has been taught to humanity through all of the Prophets beginning with Adam, and *a* method, specifically Islam, which came with the Prophet Muḥammad. By doing so, he affirmed that God has given the method, or God's one eternal method for humanity (*al-manhaj*), through other religious systems, particularly Christianity and Judaism. At the same time he affirmed the particularity of Islam's manifestation as a method associated with Muhammad, who was a legislator and special agent of Islam. This is not an innovative way of viewing Islam especially in relation to other religions. But the fact that Sha'rāwī was reaffirming this position with direct reference to the Qur'an at a time when the others were asserting the priority of Islam at the expense of recognizing the validity of other religious traditions, is important to note.

Although Sha'rāwī recognized the common thread in all religious systems as related to God, he did not view all methods of religion equally. He derived his understanding of the meaning of Islam from both the Quranic notion of submission and the understanding of Islam as the most perfect religion:

> "Truly Islam is the final religion and Islam is the first religion. So Abraham is the father of the Muslims (submitters)… so be as God has called you-the submitters (al-*muslimīn*). The end result of your submission (*islāmukum*) is the perfection of this Islam. The Prophet will be a witness for you on the day of judgment according to what he informed you concerning [your] religion and

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[202] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Fatawa Kul Māyahum al-Muslim fi Ḥayātihi Yawmihi wa Ghaddihi* (al-Qāhira: al-Maktaba al-Tawfīqīa), p. 584.

> [according to] what he taught you, so that you will be happy in this life and in the next life. In this way we see that God named us the Muslims (*al-muslimīn*) and did not [only] describe us as the submitters, because Islam is for the believers (*mu'min*) a description, a noun and a proper noun. This has a clear meaning which is: the religion that is with God (*dīn 'ind allah*) is Islam because the name has become a description and a proper name for us. But submission (*islām*) in relation to those who came before us is a description only. Truly all of the religions are described [by the word] submitter (*islām*) but we are the followers of the Prophet Muhammad."[203]

Muslims are special because they follow Muḥammad and following Muḥammad is the "religion with God" but this does not mean that what came before is invalidated, only that it is not as perfect because being called a Muslim (as a proper noun) means following the law as Muḥammad's way. Here Sha'rāwī was telling his audience that their religion is the best religion in its specificity, but also, in a more universally applicable way, their religion is like other religions. Even though the manifestation of God's prescribed method as it was given to Muhammad is perfect, Sha'rāwi also stipulated that neither God nor God's universal method belong to the Muslim community alone. Thus Sha'rāwī made two affirmations which serve as the basic principles of his understanding of manhaj: that God has given to humanity, since the creation of Adam, a method for proper worship, and that Muslims have been given the most perfect method, which is a complete way of life, in order that they may perfect this worship.

➢ Wasaṭīya: Moderation

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[203] Shaykh Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fi Tarbiyyati al-Insān,* pp. 30-31.

Another important aspect of Shaykh Sha‘rāwī's method was offering people a moderate method (*wasaṭīya*) to implement God's system in their lives. Sha‘rāwī 's wasaṭīya included moderation in political and social outlook, as well as in religion. He summed up his idea of how religious adherence is meant to be easy when he said: "Nothing in religion causes anguish or hardship for the individual."[204] Sha‘rāwī understood this ease to be reflected in divine notions of the religious life. God wanted to make religion easy for people, thereby providing happiness in this life and the next through his method. It was not God's intention to burden believers with commands that were difficult to fulfill. Hence, for Sha‘rāwī, the moderate way was God's way.

To understand Sha‘rāwī's notion of moderation it is also important to realize that he began preaching at a time when failed Western systems discouraged people from looking to the government to solve their problems. Nasr's attempts in the 1960's to use socialism to raise the standard of living for Egyptians had failed miserably. At the same time the ideology of the Islamists, those whose understanding of Islam came from a mix of Western and Islamic education, became more geared towards implementation of an Islamic power and some had even turned towards violence to accomplish this goal. Although the "return to religion" at this time throughout the Muslim majority world is often referred to as a turn towards internal as opposed to external solutions to problems facing nations like Egypt, this characterization does not consider all of the aspects of renewed religious interest. The emphasis placed on moderation by men like Sha‘rāwī

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[204] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha‘rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fī Tarbiyyati al-Insān*, p. 30.

attests to the fact that the ‘ulamā’ had begun to figure out how to reach the people from within the tradition. Furthermore, as a representative of that tradition, Sha‘rāwī was able to carve out a middle ground because according to him neither the Islamist groups nor the government were acting in accordance with Islamic principles. Both were concerned with their own thoughts and not with God’s words. This way of navigating between opposing sides, in this case the Egyptian government and religious extremism, was a trademark of Sha‘rāwī.

Claiming the middle way as a means of reform began in Egypt before Sha‘rāwī ’s time. Rashīd Riḍa and Muḥammad ‘Abduh also saw their project as one of moderation although what they were moderating between differed from what Sha‘rāwī faced because they lived in a different era. Sha‘rāwī’s popularity as a voice of moderation was also shared with other ‘alim-preachers in Egypt in his own time. Russell Baker, in writing on the Wasitiyya movement in Egypt today stresses that it is a “centrist current” between the two extremes of failed Western notions of nationalism and socialism on the one hand and the push for establishing an Islamic government- even by violent means- on the other. The Muslim Brotherhood is a part of this Wasitiyya movement because, according to Baker, the Brotherhood has been centrist since its inception. The only time they veered away from their centrist position was under the leadership of Sayyid Qutb when they were violently repressed during Nasser’s rule. The violent faction that grew out of the

Muslim Brotherhood at this time is now only a fringe element of the group.[205] Baker also introduces us to two of the ‘alim-preachers who serve as spokesmen for the Wasitiyya movement: Muḥammad Ghazālī (d. 2005), and Yūsuf Qarāḍawī, both popular preachers born in Egypt, who have been closely tied to the Muslim Brotherhood.

Unlke the Wasitiyya movement Baker describes, Sha‘rāwī’s *wasaṭīya* was not comprised of an ideology and so did not constitute the founding of a movement. But there are some similarities between what Sha‘rāwī proposed and what preachers like Ghazālī and Qarāḍawī are advocating. In fact, many of these similarities can be traced back to Rashīd Riḍa. To begin with all have based their moderate stances on the prophetic principle that religion is easy.[206] There is also the Quranic verse 2:143, which states: “We have made you an umma justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over you.” Sha‘rāwī and members of the Wasatiyya movement have defined moderation based on the idea that ease and balance are important in individual faith and for the umma as a whole. ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf told me during an interview that Sha‘rāwī’s moderate method included the understanding that moderation as a religious principle should be applied to all aspects of life. If we eat, we should eat until we are full and then stop, but we should never deprive ourselves of food

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[205] Raymond Baker, *Islam Without Fear*, see introduction for a definition of this movement. Baker’s is an important study as it includes some very popular preachers within the movmemnt. Also see Meir Hatina, *Identity Politics in the Middle East: Liberal Thought and Islamic Challenge in Egypt* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), especially chapter 8. Most of the book though is still is engaged in the study of the two trends of “liberal” and “Islamist” thought.

[206] Volume 1, Book 2, Number 38: Bukhari Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "Religion is very easy and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way. So you should not be extremists, but try to be near to perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded; and gain strength by worshipping in the mornings, the nights." (See Fatḥ al-Bāri Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Al-juz’u al- awal (*Al-Qāhira: Maktaba Miṣr, 2001), p.102.

when we need to eat. When we pray, we must not raise our voices too loud or be too soft. Thus moderate behavior helps Muslims keep on the straight path as ordered by God.[207] Shaykh Sha‘rāwī’s moderate method also included his gentle way of admonishing. As his son said, he would speak of heaven before he would speak of hell,

> “He was not on the right or left but in the middle (*wasaṭ)*. He solved many problems by choosing the simplest solution, as did the Prophet, he always chose the most moderate way because he wanted to be welcoming and to make people love religion [he did not want them] to fear. He always mentioned paradise before hell and he would always say how good deeds lead people to heaven before he would say how bad deeds lead to hell. Many preachers are using this method now in da‘wā (summoning through preaching).”[208]

But in advocating these basic prescriptions for moderation, finding simple solutions, helping people love religion, mentioning paradise before hell, Shaykh Sha‘rāwī was not alone. Yūsuf Qarāḍawī and Muḥammad Ghazālī claim the same method of moderation and they, like Shaykh Sha‘rāwī, also understood moderation to be between violence and complacency, harshness and laxity and between the government and violent political movements.[209] Qarāḍawī, who began his television preaching career around the same time as Shaykh Sha‘rāwī, even understands his wasaṭīya as gentle and appropriate. He writes that he wants to help Muslims love their religion and that what he is doing is offering a message that is appropriate for the times.[210] He also calls for moderation in

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[207] Abdul Ra’uf, Personal interview, Zamalek, Cairo, Egypt, July 2009.
[208] Abdul Raḥīm al- Sha‘rāwī, Sha‘rāwī Center, Cairo, Egypt 2008.
[209] Yusuf Qaradawi’s book entitled *Al-Saḥwa al-Islāmiyya Bayna al-Juḥūd wa al-Taṭarruf*, translates as “The Islamic Awakening; Between Rejectionism and Extremism.”
[210] Gundrun Kramer, “Drawing Boundaries,” in *Speaking for Islam*, p. 109. For more on Qarāḍawī see Qasim Zaman, “Epilogue,” in *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education, ed.* Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 259-264, and Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse*, chapter 11.

ritual performance and in daily habits. In order to understand the difference between the moderate method of Sha'rāwī and that of Qarāḍawī we need to look further into their actual discourses.

On closer examination we see that Qarāḍawī's version of wasaṭīya is actually a middle ground between the stance of political Islam (and the discourse of the Islamic awakening (*ṣaḥwa)* tracing its roots back to Sayyid Qutb) and the importance of the continued role of the 'ulamā' as the repositories of knowledge, in formulating the foundations of that awakening. Qarāḍawī also understands his mission (*da'wā)* as navigating between offering Muslims a way to "wake up," and offering non-Muslims a vision of Islam that is opposed to extremism.[211] How does he characterize his mission? In expounding on the meaning of extremism Qarāḍawī writes:

> "Islam recommends moderation in everything….Consequently, the Prophet resisted every tendency toward excessive religiosity and rebuked those of his Companions who overemphasized worship and asceticism to the point were they had exceeded the limits of moderation affirmed by Islam. The Prophet himself, thanks to Islam, struck a balance between the spiritual and the material, between the concerns of this world and the concerns of the world to come, and between the individual's right to life and (his/her) enjoyment and the Sustainer's right to receive the worship and service for which human beings were created. Islam has instituted acts of worship which serve to purify the soul and elevate human beings both spiritually and materially. At the same time acts of worship serve to elevate the entire community, setting it upon a foundation of brotherhood and solidarity…. Islam approves of neither the pursuit of spirituality at the expense of the material nor the tendency to purify the soul by depriving and punishing the body advocated by other religions and philosophies."[212]

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[211] Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse*, 1997, pp. 200-205.

[212] Yūsuf Qarāḍawī, *Islamic Awakening Between Rejection and Extremism*, ed., Nancy Roberts (Virginia: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), pp. 10-11. See chapter 1 for his basic formulation of what this middle ground is.

Qarāḍawī's concern for moderation as expressed in the quote above seems similar to Sha'rāwī's ideas, for example Sha'rāwī also held the position that Muslims should not sacrifice the spiritual to the material, nor the material to the spiritual. But Qarāḍawī sets up a binary opposition between God's desire to be worshipped, which is reflected in a concern for the world to come, and human desires to "enjoy themselves" which results in our becoming preoccupied with the concerns of this world. His moderation between these two extremes then appears to be between human desire and the divine will or between the individual's right and God's right.

For Sha'rāwī, God's will provides human enjoyment in this world and the next. One does not balance between one's own right to life and God's right to be worshipped, instead living correctly according to God's will means human beings will flourish, thereby combining the desires of both. Sha'rāwī also did not characterize his method of moderation in terms of a mediation between human desires and God's desires, even though he does recognize that at times they can be at odds, because they are not set up in opposition to one another. For Sha'rāwī, human desire is what blocks human beings from enjoyment it is not what provides the individual with happiness. Once individuals live according to God's will then they receive true happiness in this life and the next.

Furthermore, when we compare Qarāḍawī's statement to Sha'rāwī's ideas about the purposes of worship and the need for performing the ritual obligations there are some other striking contrasts. Qarāḍawī has the same notion that the individual builds upon the pillars of the faith but what she builds is focused on the good of the individual spiritually

and materially,as well as the good of the community, which provides a foundation of unity. Qarāḍawī also says that Muslims should abide by God's limits, presenting God's limits as if they are in service of the good the individual can do in society. Qarāḍawī also does not specify the origin of the reason for worshipping God therefore omitting any theological formulation about the nature of the relationship between the individual and God. In contrast, Sha'rāwī specified the origin of the obligation of worship as being a consequence of the entrustment God offered to humanity. In doing so he presented worship as an act of love because it is undertaken by choice. Furthermore, for Sha'rāwī humanity's goal in following the orders of God is not to elevate society or the individual, that comes naturally when one follows the law, but to see that God's beauty is manifested and that God's justice is implemented. For both men the outcome is the same: benefit to self and society, but while for Sha'rāwī this benefit is only the outcome for Qarāḍawī this outcome is also equivalent to the goal.

Sha'rāwī also rarely spoke of Islam as an active entity- as a force that recommends, institutes or approves. The notion of an active Islam, however, is critical to Qarāḍawī's focus on action for the sake of society and plays an important role in his formulation of wasaṭīya. In the above quote, Qarāḍawī also uses the idea of an active Islam to speak of Islam as a system differentiated from Muḥammad when he states that Muḥammad was able to advocate moderation thanks to Islam, not as an example of Islam. For Qarāḍawī, Islam is itself a living source of the divine; not as a particular

religious method legislated by Muhammad, but as something Muhammad could utilize for religious purposes.

For many years before Qaradawi was exiled to Qatar, he was associated with the Muslims Brotherhood and he has said that the teachings of Ḥasan al-Banna are still important to him. Although his relationship with the Brotherhood is today unclear, there is no doubt that the way he essentializes Islam owes its origins to the thinking of the most prominent and influential leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb. Like Sayyid Qutb, Qarāḍawī uses the term "Islam" for the purposes of mobilization but he does not specify what Islam actually is in this new formulation.[213] Qarāḍawī's essentialized notion of Islam is borrowed from the Orientalist literature that postulates Islam as an undefined, but powerful force responsible for negative behavior. In the case of Qarāḍawī, and Sayyid Qutb, while they see Islam as a powerful force, for them it is essentially positive.

Moreover, Qutb developed the notion of two categories, "intrinsic and extrinsic, authentic and imputed" in order to commend Islam as the former correct method in opposition to the West.[214] Qarāḍawī is less interested in pointing out what is corrupt about Western society and more interested in speaking to modern Muslims (and non-Muslims) about what is right about Islam. As a result he is also more focused on societal than political change. These differences allow him to advocate for the important role of

[213] See Roxanne Euben, *Enemy in the Mirro*r, chapter 3.
[214] Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*, p. 51 She goes on to say: "Thus the very scope of what constitutes religious authority for Qutb renders the line between political theory and Islamic thought somewhat permeable. An argument about divine authority becomes an argument about sovereignty in the ideal political community" (p. 52).

the ‘ulamā’ in such a transition. It is in the “post-Qutbian” world that Qutb’s radical stance has been tempered by Qarāḍawī’s insistance that only the ‘ulamā’, as the ones who transmit religious knowledge, can lead any movement of reform.[215] Still the fact that he uses the idea of Islam as a prefect system, for the purpose of reviving God’s rule, remains close to Qutb’s original formulation.

Sha‘rāwī’s method of moderation while in form resembling that of Qarāḍawī in practice differed greatly from the idea of moderation as a social movement or as “the centrist Islamic mainstream.”[216] In opposition to the Qutb-Qarāḍawī formulation of Islam as a system, one appropriate to govern society, Sha‘rāwī kept notions of religion embedded in the larger discourse concerning the relationship between human action and God’s purposes. Additionally, Sha‘rāwī’s did not espouse his method of moderation because it ultimately makes religion easier for people. Instead for Sha‘rāwi the moderate method was what God had chosen for humanity out of his divine wisdom and mercy.

He expressed the idea that the moderate method is God’s method in the notion that God is the third side of any dispute. The third side provides a screen (sitr) to hide the humiliation that both parties feel when they consider a reconciliation, hence it allows a solution to any argument be born. By submitting to God, human dignity is preserved, but at the same time submitting to God means providing ourselves with a screen, a solution to problems. The reason the religion of Islam came into the world was to establish God’s method. When the method of heaven is in control then humanity is not humiliated. In

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[215] Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse*, p. 202.
[216] See Raymond Baker, *Islam Without Fear*.

the same way when one is obedient to God's laws then disputes between people vanish because with God's law there is no pain or anguish. Religion then serves the purpose of instituting God's law, which in turn eases the way for people and provides them with dignity.[217]

> "When two [people] are disputing and there is the desire of both to end the argument, it is not possible to end the argument to the complete satisfaction [of both sides] except in the light of the law of God (*sharī'at allah)*. When the desire to reconcile is born between two individuals or groups then truly that desire is the decision of heaven. Therefore God prepares for the two groups a third side so that God can put forth his efforts to reconcile which is what makes reconciliation easy between two individuals or two groups." [218]

We have a definite hierarchy of action here, first God desires reconciliation and prepares a third side, which enables the two sides to desire reconciliation. But at the same time reconciliation cannot be born except by God's law. Therefore God is active in his law and through that activity, when people follow the law, all things are made easy. But the two groups must take action to reconcile, God's intervention only makes it possible and "easy" it does not guarantee the outcome.[219] God opens the space for the human being to act and because of that when the human being does act God (and God's law) serves as the intermediary. This third side is the center between the disputers and only with this third side, recognized or not, can satisfaction for both sides be achieved.

Sha'rāwī was advocating action, but he was also claiming that action can not occur without God's intervention, which provides an easy way. It is about the individual

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[217] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fi Tarbiyyati al-Insān*, pp. 30-33.
[218] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fi Tarbiyyati al-Insān*, p. 31.
[219] This stance also reaffirms the theological mainstream position of Sunni Islam, which states that all action originates with God but that humans are still held responsible for their actions.

submitting to God's openings, and then through that submission mercy through solution is born. But this does not necessarily have to be consciously undertaken by the individual. In explaining how the month of Rajab, in which fighting is prohibited, provides this same sort of opening Shaykh Sha'rāwī says that submitting to God's law during this month provides dignity to the weak and keeps the strong from becoming too arrogant, thereby providing a way in which the two sides can eventually reconcile.

> "It protects the weak [side] by [allowing them to] take refuge in it. It [also] prevents the strong from showing strength in an extreme way. This is how we know that God has given us the divine law which protects human dignity and prunes arrogance and affirms the superiority of the human without humiliation."[220]

These passages clearly illustrate Sha'rāwī's formulation of how a middle path between two extremes, or two seemingly irreconcilable ideas, is forged in a way which is easy for human beings because it allows them to keep their dignity. Sha'rāwi also specifically referenced the necessity of God's intervention and humanity's submission to God's law. There is a balancing of human and divine participation, not dependence on human action or movement, but in concert with it.

Sha'rāwī grounded his lesson about the conciliatory nature of God in the lives of the people he spoke to, and he also lived his life according to the principle that moderation helps the human being by providing an easy way to reconciliation. When I asked people in Egypt why Sha'rāwī was so beloved, they never failed to mention his gentle nature, his sense of humor, his gentle style of preaching, and his mild manner; all of which were part

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[220] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fī Tarbiyyati al-Insān*, p. 35.

of his attractiveness and his method of moderation. But Sha'rāwī also stressed that gentleness meant helping people by not overburdening them with too many laws all at once. He was less of an admonisher than a teacher, someone interested in inspiring a love for religion at a time when many people were neglecting religion and instead reaching for external inspiration. These people, according to Sha'rāwī, needed to be shown that returning to religion was not frightening or difficult.

Consequently Sha'rāwī insisted that the *dā'iya* (the one who summons) be soft and gentle. When calling others to the faith a summoner must observe the method of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad as examples of good manners. Summoners must be aware that they are asking people to leave what they love to do and so to avoid imposing this hardship they must use the "best manners." For example when Muhammad said to his opponents, "You will not be questioned about our sins, and we will not be questioned about what you do" (Qur'an, 34:25), he did not say "we will not be responsible for your sins" because that would have made his opponents defensive by forcing them to face their sins. He did highlight his own sins and those of his community because the pagans in Muhammad's time saw the faith of Islam as a sin. By arguing with his opponents this way Muhammad practiced the highest manners by trying hard not to offend, and not to impose hardships. For Sha'rāwī summoning in a hated way meant imposing two hardships: that of asking people to leave what they are used to and that of blocking the way to the truth through harsh words and exhortation.[221] Summoners must have the

[221] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fi Tarbiyyati al-Insān*, pp. 16-18.

ability to understand the circumstances of those they summon, and they must be magnanimous in their presentation, soft in speech, wise in the exhortation and have a better argument.[222] Most importantly a preacher must raise him/herself above the human desire for superiority by arguing with the "logic of God" (*muntiq al-haqq*) in heaven, understanding that justice is the method. If opponents can not be won over in this way, then they must be left alone to live in peace as long as they do not engage in sedition. According to Sha'rāwī it is not for the summoner to force religion upon someone whom God has not made ready to receive it. God teaches the difference between truth and falsehood by setting forth the proper behavior in arguing.[223] Sha'rāwī placed God in control of both human endeavors; the method of the summoner and the reception of the one who is summoned. There is no action if God does not act first.

In all of the aspects of Sha'rāwī's method of moderation, the gentleness of his nature, his notion that moderation was necessary in all aspects of life, including religion, and his idea that living according to God's law results in moderation, all reference God as an active source. Like the other elements of his method, wasaṭīya depended upon and originates with God and his desires for humanity as laid out in the revelation.

Conclusion

The foundational elements of Shaykh Sha'rāwī 's method relied on the understanding that all knowledge originates in God and that human participation in God's

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[222] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fī Tarbiyyati al-Insān*, p. 16.
[223] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fī Tarbiyyati al-Insān*, p. 19.

creation is both necessitated by that knowledge and should be based on it, a concept we will explore in more depth in the next chapter. Shaʻrāwī 's insistence on the need for renewal, his concept of the middle way and his understanding of God's method were not only crucial to the implementation of his message, they also firmly identify him as having participated in the influential discourses of his time and of the past.

Shaʻrāwī understood his project to be one of renewal because he believed that Muḥammad's religion needed explicating in light of the changes brought about in the technological and scientific era. His concept of moderation also included notions related to how his message and method were suitable to the particular age in which he lived. What Egyptians needed was to be brought back to their religion after interaction with the forces of modernity had weakened their commitment to the faith. For this purpose, Shaykh Shaʻrāwī presented Islam as a system without hardship and he did so in a relatively gentle manner. His formulations of renewal, moderation, and God's prescribed method also provide us with a way to view how he interacted with the society in which he lived.

The discourse he put forth based on this method was suitable to the era in which he lived but it was also connected to the past because of the way he assimilated temporal changes into the timeless. Thus he kept the focus on God by directing his audience, in all aspects of his method, back to the message of the revelation. This enabled him to express the ultimate goal of religious participation in terms of the eternal, allowing this emphasis to continue beyond his generation. By exploring the basic aspects of Shaykh Shaʻrāwī's

method in terms of their ultimate focus and goal, and how the events of his life helped shape them, we are able now to move on to examining how he utilized them in his epistemology to enforce the primacy of God's knowledge and the 'ulamā''s role in explicating that knowledge.

Chapter Four

Authority Through Disclosed Knowledge

> "Politics is the struggle of human thought against other human thought. But religion subjects human thought to heavenly thought. The difference in the very nature of the case is large. Explanation and clarification are not needed."[224]

Introduction

In this chapter we will begin to examine how, through his preaching, Shaykh Sha'rāwī emphasized the unique capacity of the 'ulamā' to direct religious discourse amidst threats to the primary status of revelatory knowledge, the understanding of which is gained through the religious sciences (*al-'ulūm al-dīnīya*). By insisting that access to irrefutable knowledge can only be gained through proper revelatory interpretation, he also affirmed the necessity of the 'ulamā''s as intermediaries between divine disclosures and human understanding. Basic Islamic epistemology explains knowledge according to a bipartite division between human knowledge (both secular and religious) and God's knowledge. Religious knowledge, however, is distinguished from secular knowledge because it is directly linked to God; it entails deciphering God's will and intentions as they are disclosed in the revelatory sources.[225] Additionally, the transmission of religious knowledge relies on various modes of acquisition, which are associated with the different ways it is attained. Humans acquire knowledge through proper action, but God has the

[224] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Al-Shaykh al- Sha'rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīmah*, p. 45.
[225] Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), see chapter 1.

power to bestow it when, and on whom, he desires.[226] Hence, we have a tripartite understanding of what is required for the individual Muslim to acquire knowledge: practically pursuing human knowledge associated with the religious and non-religious sciences, proper behavior, and God's bestowal on the pious.

These three modes of acquisition, study, behavior and passive reception, are not just interdependent in procurement and use, when they manifest concomitantly they are authenticated by one another. There is a necessary connection between behavior and knowledge in Islam, which means that both exoteric and esoteric knowledge are gained through action.[227] The two types of knowledge are complementary, ("every scholar is a mystic and every mystic is a scholar").[228] One who transmits knowledge as an 'alim, and a gnostic, must display his knowledge of God's rules in his life as well as his teachings. The demonstration of exoteric knowledge, in life and thought, is considered necessary to any esoteric knowledge because God grants esoteric understanding to those who have perfected their servitude.

Sha'rāwī was seen by his admirers to have three modes of acquired these three types of knowledge. As we explored in chapter 2, displaying pious behavior aided Sha'rāwī because following God's prescriptions beyond obligatory duty affirmed the credibility of both the knowledge he attained and his devotion to God. We have already discerned the importance of Sha'rāwī's exemplary piety, we will devote this chapter to

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[226] Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 32.
[227] Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 248.
[228] Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 166-168. Rosenthal quotes the famous Sufi al-Qushari here. He also states that for the Sufis knowledge is available to everyone but gnosis is only available to the saints, more on this in the next chapter.

exploring his relationship with exoteric (human) sciences, in relation to his vocation as an ‘alim preacher. In the next chapter we will explore how his connection to the esoteric (divine) sciences, reflected his special relationship with God.[229]

As a representative of the religious sciences, Sha‘rāwī strove to explicate the knowledge that God had already disclosed to humanity. As an ‘alim, Sha‘rāwī was among a class of scholars who were experts in the exoteric sciences such as law, doctrinal and creedal formations, and Quranic exegesis. However, the realm of exoteric knowledge as it relates to the religious sciences, and the ideas and institutions of which it is comprised, underwent a complete transformation in the contemporary period. In Egypt the ‘ulamā’ lost their control of religious law, education, and funding. Preaching, however, is one of the means the ‘ulamā’ continue to employ in the modern period to assert their dominance in the realm of religious knowledge. The ‘ulamā’ who have utilized the vocation of preaching have found an avenue that allows them to continue to transmit religious knowledge, despite their loss of dominion in so many other areas. So, even though the ‘ulamā’’s authority was undermined, they have used preaching to assert their relevance at a time when it was being questioned.

In Islamic epistemology secular and religious knowledge are comprised of a number of sciences. In the modern period, because the secular sciences expanded and became the focus of education, trumping the primacy of religious knowledge, secularly

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[229] According to Rozenthal the Sufis came to view their involvement with the esoteric as a science, which in the case of an ‘alim-preacher is a fitting way to view the how esoteric knowledge is communicated. Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 160-180.

trained specialists began to claim authority over religious knowledge. As a consequence of this dissipation and usurpation, the ‘ulamā’ lost control over the public discourse concerning religion. This made it necessary for them to defend and revitalize their vocation as the directors of religious thought, but they have done so in a changed atmosphere.

The ‘ulamā’ have had to reaffirm their relevance in Egypt both by partaking in conventions with which they are not usually associated, such as joining social movements, utilizing television and other technologies, and strengthening the institutions that have been part of their repertoire throughout Islamic history, such as preaching. Thus, preaching offers us the opportunity to examine the ‘ulamā’ defense of their religious authority because they have utilized sermons in the past as well as the present to speak to believers about lived reality as it relates to questions of piety. They have displayed and solidified their role as the indispensable transmitters of religious knowledge. In examining the content of the sermons of modern preachers we can decipher how they have dealt with the undermining of religious institutions including threats to the ‘ulamā’ as the guardians of the religious sciences. But the lessons of contemporary preachers, seen in the context of historical contingencies, also offer us a glimpse into how the every day concerns of believers are involved in the polemics of this defense and how this adds to the transformation of the traditional role of the ‘ulamā’ as well as to the content of their messages.

Shaykh Sha‘rāwī was particularly gifted at showing the people how complicated

theological concepts related to their modern lives. In the process he reaffirmed his role as the one who could explicate that connection. This was partly because he preached his religious message as an ‘alim, and partly because he made himself present in the lives of the people of Egypt by appearing weekly on television. But the authority of Sha‘rāwī was comprised of much more than that. What made him unique was how he exemplified ‘ulamā’ authority but also how he redirected the Egyptian public towards theological understandings, often of complicated subjects, in ways they could understand. He validated his role through his life and his message. Because he was a religious expert and because, as an exemplar, he embodied that expertise, his audiences believed that he was able to decipher God’s message for them. In this chapter we will look at how he reinforced the necessity of his expertise through his messages about how God created and controlled the various realms of knowledge. While this exposition seems too complicated for televised sermons directed towards average people it was necessitated by the circumstances; threats to religious understanding and the authority of the ‘ulamā’ had to be dealt with and Sha‘rāwī used his sermons for this purpose.

As an example we will look at the way Sha‘rāwī utilized theological concepts to explain the transformation he and the people of Egypt were witnessing. He spoke about this transformation from a place of religious authority, incorporating, revising and rejecting where necessary. The first step in this affirmation was to redirect the discourse on knowledge and to again ground it as a theological concept, not in competition with other forms of knowledge, but as the basis from which all knowledge springs.

Furthermore, by relating epistemological concerns to the theological Sha‘rāwī reasserted the primacy of theological knowledge, above all types of secular knowledge, such as scientific or political, by presenting them as subject to the control of God’s will.

Although human knowledge is comprised of the secular and religious sciences only the religious sciences can serve to bridge the gap between humanity and God’s disclosures. Hence, in his expositions about knowledge Sha‘rāwī identified the secular aspects of human knowledge that had taken precedence in the modern period, and he explained how they must be grasped in the context of revelatory truth, thereby placing his specialty above all of the others. What is embedded in this approach is not only an affirmation of the fact that all human knowledge must be viewed in light of its source in God’s knowledge, but also the necessity of the ‘ulamā’, because of their training in the religious sciences, to decipher God’s knowledge as it was disclosed in the Qur’an and ḥadīth. His message about knowledge was that God is the source of all knowledge, divine and human, secular and religious. He also clarified how those who were trained in the religious sciences were exclusively capable of deciphering divine knowledge as it had been manifested in the revelation, which God had disclosed to humanity as the only verifiable truth. We will search Sha‘rāwī’s epistemology, as he laid it out in his sermons, to find signs of these assertions, and of how he confirmed the unique necessity of the ‘ulamā as a result.

To fully comprehend the place of knowledge in the contemporary context as well as its place in the world and speech of Sha‘rāwī, it is important to first examine religious

knowledge and its tradition of transmission before the modern era. This examination will help us appreciate not only the history of religious dissemination but also the diversity of actors and information involved in its transmission before the advent of modernity. It will also provide us with the opportunity to compare earlier manifestations of diversity to the more extreme divergence that has recently taken place. Sha‘rāwī, as a representative of the stable system of transmission amongst these drastic changes, formulated his reaction to them by employing his epistemology to demonstrate how exoteric religious knowledge was the domain of the ‘ulamā’ in lieu of their training. By examining how he did so within the discourse of preaching we will see how one ‘alim was able to assert his authority amongst the divergent voices competing with him in what was once the exclusive realm of the ‘ulamā’, namely the transmission of religious knowledge.

➢ Concepts of ‘Ilm and the ‘Ulamā Before the Modern Period

Institutions of learning in medieval Islam were divided into three categories of knowledge: the Islamic sciences, philosophy and natural science, and the literary arts. Within this tripartite division, the Islamic sciences were preeminent by the eleventh century, as they had total "control and ascendancy" over the other disciplines.[230] Moreover, the religious sciences were comprised of different fields of expertise. According to the famous Sunni jurist and theologian al-Ghazālī (d. 1111/AH 505) the religious sciences had two parts. First, there was science of fundamental principles:

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[230] George Makdisi, *The Rise of the Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), p. 76.

tawhīd, monotheism or divine unity, prophethood, eschatology and the sources of knowledge (Qur'an, Sunna, consensus of the scholars, and knowledge of the Arabic language). Second, there was the science of the "derived principles" including: obligations to God, obligations to society and obligations to oneself. All of these were separate from the non-religious sciences, which included mathematics, logic, the natural sciences and metaphysics.[231] In the religious sciences al-Ghazālī separated knowledge of foundational beliefs based on the revelatory texts, from knowledge of how beliefs should be applied to fulfill ones obligations to God and society. The 'ulamā' were responsible for knowing and disseminating both the essential subject material and its application, even though they represented different realms of 'ulamā' responsibility. The science of "derived principles" contained knowledge that the 'ulamā' were responsible for correctly transmitting to all believers, because every Muslim needed to be taught the proper way to fulfill their religious obligations.[232] The responsibility for instructing the common people about their religious obligations usually fell to the preachers and admonishers among the 'ulamā'.[233] However, sometimes preachers were not 'ulamā', and lacked sufficient training, but came from a Sufi background. Even with this diversity, within the realm of religious sciences, the religious experts had a distinctive authority, one they controlled, or

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[231] Abdullah Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp.10-11.

[232] Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), see pp. 201-215 for how the religious education of the common people was considered crucial and for how the people were instructed.

[233] Johs. Peterson, "The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher," *Goldziher Memorial* I (1948). P. 217-225. For the responsibility and necessity of the preacher see *Ibn al-Jawzī*, *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa'l-Mudhakkirīn*, annotated and translated by Merlin Swartz (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq Editeurs, 1971), pp. 99-107. Also see the introduction by Swartz, pp. 58-60.

attempted to control, based on their expertise in these sciences.[234]

It was the established ‘ulamā’, who oversaw the system of education, made the decisions about what knowledge should be transmitted, and who conveyed certain aspects of religious knowledge to the public at large.[235] So the ‘ulamā’ expertise in the religious sciences was recognized as both exclusive, in that they were a self-regulated group, and broad, because their corps, especially the preachers, reached beyond what could be controlled by set standards. The medieval system of education was also fluid because the boundaries of what was considered a proper religious education were constantly changing. Additionally, non-specialists who helped implement the system. According to Jonathan Berkey, “disagreement and polyvocality” have always been present in the discourse of Islam resulting at least in part from the fact that there were no clear standards set in pre-modern Islam as to either what the essential elements of knowledge were or who was allowed to transmit knowledge.[236] Religious education was by no means standardized, as evidenced in the sustained critiques of the most highly trained ‘ulamā who were disappointed by the low standards of education offered by teachers and preachers.[237] Transmission of knowledge depended on individual relationships and oral

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[234] Joseph Peterson, “The Crisicism of the Islamic Preacher,” p. 217. Also see *Ibn al-Jawzī*, *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa’l-Mudhakkirīn*, annotated and translated by Merlin Swartz. This book gives a general picture of both how important it was to men like Ibn Jawzī to try to ensure that preachers possessed proper ‘ulamā’ training, especially in the area of ḥadīth and how closely this function was guarded because of the corruption of the occupation by those who did not belong to the learned classes. Also see Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture*, chapter 1.

[235] George Makdisi, *The Rise of the Colleges*, which gives an overall accounting of the system of education in relation to the institutions of learning. Makdisi also argues for the influence of the founders of individual schools (madrasas and others), pp. 70-90.

[236] Jonathan Berkey, “Madrasa Medieval and Modern,” *Schooling Islam,* pp. 40-59

[237] Johs. Peterson, “The Crisicism of the Islamic Preacher,” pp. 219-227.

transmission more than on institutions of learning and the written word, which added flexibility to the system of knowledge as it pertained to religious edification. The oral character of knowledge transmission also increased the importance of the people's preachers.[238]

Preachers were also independent, even when they were officially employed, and therefore their sermons were diverse.[239] Since spreading knowledge through sermons depended on oral and not written forms edification, and since they were often delivered outside of official institutions of religion, preachers were hard to control, which added to even greater variation. Many preachers went outside of the boundaries of what other more conventional 'ulamā' advocated. Some were Sufi preachers who claimed direct knowledge of God to justify contravening traditional wisdom.[240] In addition there were the popular preachers who appear to have had little or no official training in the religious sciences but who enjoyed incredible popularity among the people, much to the dislike of those who called for strict adherence to one vision of Islam.[241] As a result, their messages

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[238] Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, see chapters 1 and 2.
[239] Carl F. Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 261. Johs. Peterson, "The Crisicism of the Islamic Preacher," 270..
[240] See Johs. Peterson, "The Crisicism of the Islamic Preacher," p. 226-228. Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*. In chapter one he examines the role of Sufism and popular culture including preaching. Some academics have assumed that the 'ulamā' and Sufis were at odds because of such controversies. But often, as in the modern era, Sufis and 'ulamā' were one and the same and the conflict seems to come more from a disagreement on the content of what was transmitted. In terms of public roles the 'ulamā' didn't often publicly claim both the right to interpret scriptures as religious scholars and mystics since the types of knowledge needed for each and therefore the authority each claimed came from very different realms. Also see Carl F. Petry *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages*, especially pp. 220-274, for how fluid the two categories were and for how they manifested in different occupations.
[241] See Jonathan Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 64-69. Berkey gives an account of how higher level scholars and even judges tried to silence certain misinformed preachers. But he also warns against viewing

and admonitions often contained non-conventional topics and incorrect religious advice, which concerned the more reputable ‘ulamā’.

These well-respected ‘ulamā’ thought that independent preachers were particularly damaging because of the supposed “ignorance” of the common people. This ignorance allegedly meant that the folk had a pressing need for correct knowledge. Much of the literature about preaching, advises preachers to include only simple subjects in their sermons so as not to raise questions in the minds of the common believers, which could potentially lead to an undermining of their faith.[242] In fact preachers were supposed to expound on the specifics of what proper belief and behavior entailed, and to constantly remind the population of the afterlife and therefore the dangers and rewards they would receive for their deeds. Although the preacher was advised to admonish only in reference to the revelation, they were not supposed to offer specifics as to how knowledge of the revelation was derived or how it led to the surety of belief.[243] Even with all of the attempts to control the messages of preachers, it was among the preachers that the boundaries between the official and popular Islam broke down. The official version of Islam, the one voiced in the literature of critique, and the popular version, the one practiced with variation, were melded and separated by each individual preacher

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these groups too distinctly, as sometimes a group of preachers would attempt to censored rouge members of their class.

[242] Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, p. 202-203.

[243] *Ibn al-Jawzī*, *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa'l-Mudhakkirīn*, annotated and translated by Merlin Swartz, examples of the subjects Ibn al-Jawzī thought should and should not be taught are scattered throughout. Basically he said that anything which detracts from the Qur'an and *fiqh* should be omitted by the preacher (p. 212-213). He also said that the preacher should not speak of matters related to *uṣul al-dīn*, which Swartz translates as theology (p. 226).

according to how he/she presented the message to the population.

As a group the 'ulamā' had assumed control over knowledge, but in practice their training, affiliations, and geographical regions were so varied, that they did not represent one uniform group.[244] Although there were voiced standards of education especially concerning religious knowledge diversity persisted, even within official institutions.[245] So while some 'ulamā' continually attempted to discredit those with different views of religious participation and belief, it is clear that intellectual disparity added to the rich variety of texts composed in the pre-modern era. The continuation of criticism signifies the constant presence of conflicting thought. It also signifies that the critics were not effective in restraining and reining in the preachers and teachers who disagreed with them.[246] The continuance of the Islamic tradition itself rested, in part, on the presence and acceptance of disagreement. This disagreement speaks to the dynamism of tradition in its ability to contain variance and still remain recognizable precisely because of such an interaction between diversity and the attempted reassertion of the unity, in any given moment and over time. This conflict and the responsibility to constantly reaffirm and

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[244] See Omid Safi *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2006), pp. 96-100. Safi looks specifically at the Seljūqs of the 11th and 12th centuries and argues that although the Seljūks established the madrasa system to "reestablish Islamic social unity" scholars were trained in many different institutions and that Sufi institutions were as influential as other official schools. George Makdisi, *The Rise of the Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, See chapters one and two for how Makdisi considers the role and curriculum of different institutions of learning in various places. Outside of officials institutions learning was even more diverse see Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, pp. 193-201.
[245] George Makdisi, *The Rise of the Colleges,* pp. 10-27 for the different types of official learning centers that existed. Even the curriculum in these schools were varied: "The lack of a unified programme of studies should not be cause for surprise. It was in part due to the fact that the founder of an institution of learning had freedom of choice in the organization of his foundation, including the choice of courses taught" (p. 80).
[246] *Ibn al-Jawzī*, *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa'l-Mudhakkirīn*, annotated and translated by Merlin Swartz, see Swart's introduction. Also see Johs. Peterson, "The Crisicism of the Islamic Preacher," pp. 215-230.

define a vision of the unity of the tradition in the pre-modern era belonged to the ‘ulamā’, however broadly defined or variously educated.[247]

Distinctions Between Pre-modern and Modern Education

Jonathan Berkey uses the tradition of conflict and the reassertion of unity in the middle period of Islam to surmise that changes were taking place in the basic religious experience of the people of Cairo at this time. As proof of this change he offers the numerous treaties written by elites condemning new practices as innovative, (*bid‘a*). At the same time he recognizes that such treaties, especially polemical ones, can be problematic to the task of discovering what religious practice, outside of written descriptions, was really like.[248] For Berkey the center of the dispute over tradition and innovation lay in knowledge and the ‘ulamā’s authority over that knowledge.[249] Since it

[247] See Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge*, for how the Seljūks established the madrasa not to impose an overall orthodoxy (except in the study of legal principles) but for social unification of Islam which they hoped to accomplish by bringing various scholars under one system. (pp. 96-97) .

[248] Jonathan Berkey, “Tradition, Innovation and the Social Construction of Knowledge in the Medieval Islamic Near East ,” *Past and Present* 146 (Feb., 1995): p. 49. I have defined tradition slightly differently than Berkey in his article. While for him, relying on Hobsbawm, tradition is idealized and as such fixed according to this idealization, custom is the practice that changes. In my definition tradition covers both aspects as that which is ideally fixed but also open to innovations that do not threaten those idealizations. I also emphasize that this is where the variation lies, not in what changes and what is fixed, but in how threats are perceived and either incorporated or rejected outright.

[249] For Berkey this knowledge, in medieval Islamic times, included: “God's revelations to Muhammad and the sciences derived from them, … the normative guidelines and ethical injunctions of the shari‘a, the comprehensive framework of Islamic law which assigns a moral value to almost every human action, identifying each one as required, permitted, reprehensible, forbidden or indifferent. It included the rules and forms through which God expects to be worshipped by his creatures, the patterns of prayer and devotion which form the outward manifestations of the soul's devotion to God and its obedience to his will. It included familiarity with the spoken revelation of God to Muhammad, as collected in the Qur'an, and also with the hadith, stories and sayings of the Prophet which in themselves constituted a reservoir of right guidance for the pious Muslim, and the public recitation of which was a popular focus of Muslim piety” (p. 51).

is impossible to reconstruct how religion was incorporated into daily life in middle period, it is difficult to know how these polemics were incorporated into the religious lives of the people, learned or otherwise, or how they were related to changes in the institutions and structures of Islam.[250]

In contrast, in the modern period, we can examine how polemics affect both practice and the structures of religion. We can look to polemical texts (in this case ‘ulamā’ sermons) in the context of historical and anthropological reality to see both how they both affect and are affected by that reality. We can also view the diversity of modern religious voices within their environments, to give us a better sense of how and why this diversity has changed. Even though polyvocality clearly existed in the past, it increased in novel and more extreme ways. Many new elements have been added to the contemporary religious discourse amongst Muslims, which has increased divergence, both within and outside of the ranks of the ‘ulamā’. There is a proliferation today of those who “speak for Islam” and that proliferation includes ‘ulamā’ factions as well as those whose credentials do not follow past standards. How then do we characterize the difference between this supposedly new proliferation of voices, and the old phenomenon of polyvocality?

It is clear that up until the modern period in Islam certain reputable ‘ulamā’ represented a singularity of vision, but they were only one voice within the realm of religious authority. In contrast, in the modern era, changes in the structures of

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[250] See Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture*, pp. 10-11 on the difficulty of discerning between normative standards or structures of religion and actual practice in premodern times.

government, education and the institutions of religious knowledge, such as Al-Azhar, have left it unclear as to exactly who, if anyone, can claim to possess such a vision. Competition is rife among the ‘ulamā’ and between the ‘ulamā’and many non-specialists who are now claiming the same authority. Because of the harsh critiques of the ‘ulamā’ during the modern period and because of the downgrading of their authority through government intervention and new forms of schooling, many public intellectuals and Islamists who have received secular training have declared not only that the ‘ulamā’ do not have an exclusive right to religious knowledge but that their ways of deriving knowledge, and the systems that they have set up for this purpose, do not represent the true Islam. This is another way we can begin to discern a difference between modern and pre-modern diversity, to look more in depth at the recent forces that have caused rapid and dissipated change, such as the effects of modern education, governmental systems, and even technologies. This will help us to begin to discern exactly what has been modified and how.

Due to the fact that the authority of the ‘ulamā’ has been undermined by various forces throughout the modern period, it became impossible for the ‘ulamā’ to call for the control of ideas that varied from certain accepted norms. The proliferation of those claiming religious authority now also includes those secularly trained and therefore beyond the recognized control of the ‘ulamā’. Many of these newly trained elites have held the ‘ulamā’ in distain and have often repeated the criticisms of the ‘ulamā’ that began in the period of colonization and have continued throughout the modern period.

As a consequence of these discourses which compete with and criticize the ‘ulamā’, the people of Egypt no longer accept the assertion that the foundations of religious knowledge belong to and are sustained by the ‘ulamā’. In addition changes in the educational structure of Egypt as a whole have resulted in changes in the education of the people of Egypt in general. Both of these factors led to the dilution of the ‘ulamā’s quality of education, which in turn has led to the reduction of their status as those who decide the standards and goals of education, and their once exclusively held position as the exclusive source of religious expertise.[251]

Increased governmental control of the ‘ulamā’ has also changed the nature of the ‘ulamā’s independence, even though it has not completely undermined their authority. In Egypt the government still depends on the ‘ulamā of al-Azhar for religious legitimation, and more recently, to counter stronger threats from more extreme religious groups. Somehow the ‘ulamā have been able to maintain a certain amount of control over their own messages and in the case of men like Sha‘rāwī, to keep their legitimacy among the people, even while the ground has been shifting beneath them.

➢ Al-Azhar and the Reformulation of ‘Ulamā’ Authority.

Since the nineteenth century, the rulers of Egypt have tried to curb the overall influence of the ‘ulamā’. At the same time it has been advantageous for the governments

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[251] For more information about the undermining of ‘ulamā’ authority especially in reference to education see Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Univeristy of California Press, Berkley, 1998), see chapter 2. Also see the next footnote for other sources. These facts have now been well documented by these numerous studies of modern Egyptian religion.

of Egypt, from the British controlled governments of the nineteenth century, to Muhammad Ali Pasha, Gamal Abdul Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Husni Mubarak in the twentieth and now twenty first centuries, to maintain their ties to the ‘ulamā’ in order to rule a majority Muslim population that closely identifies with their religion. What these governments have all had in common is their attempt to allow the ‘ulamā’ only enough authority to legitimate their political regimes while at the same time trying to keep those same ‘ulamā’ under government control.[252]

Muhammad Ali Pasha was ruler of Egypt from 1805-1848 and he was the first Egyptian ruler to engage in serious modernizing reforms. Part of his vision included making serious changes in the financing of al-Azhar. He nationalized many of the *waqf* lands (but only those belonging to religious endowments), which had been used by the ‘ulamā’ to finance religious education and institutions, thereby curtailing their independence. It was also Muhammad Ali who introduced secular education into Egypt as a parallel learning enterprise alongside of traditional religious schools.[253]

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[252] There have been many works written recently about modern changes and their effects on Egyptian religious institutions and the ‘ulamā’, especially in reference to Al-Azhar. Among them are: Malika Zeghal, *Gardiens de l’Islam. Le Oulémas d’al-Azhar dans l’Egypte Contemporaine* (Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 1996), (Or in English: “Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulama of al-Azhar, Radical Islam, and the State (1952-94),” *International Journal of Middle Studies* 31, no. 3 (August 1999): pp. 371-399.), Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State* (The Netherlands: Brill, 1997), Tamir Moustafa, “Conflict and Cooperation between the State and Religious Institutions in Contemporary Egypt,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 1 (Feb., 2000): pp. 3-22, Meir Hatina, “Historical Legacy and the Challenge of Modernity in the Middle East: The Case of al-Azhar in Egypt,” *The Muslim World* 93 (Janurary 2003); pp. 51-68. For a more politically oriented view see Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam : Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). In addition, in Qasim Zaman’s, *The ‘Ulamā’ in Contemporary Islam*, the beginning of chapter 6 focuses on the ‘ulamā’ in Egypt.

[253] Tamir Moustafa, “Conflict and Cooperation between the State and Religious Institutions in Contemporary Egypt,” pp. 3-22.

After Muhammad Ali's time, but before the revolution of 1952, more changes were introduced by the Egyptian government, which affected al-Azhar and how it functioned in Egyptian society. A series of reorganizations of al-Azhar took place in 1896, 1911, and 1930. The focus of these reforms was to centralize religious authority within the institution, especially within the office of the Shaykh al-Azhar, the rector of al-Azhar. As a result al-Azhar's authority over religious centers, and religious schools (including the Teachers' Training College and the School of Religious Law) increased.[254] While these reforms seem to indicate that the institution then gained more power, in actuality it often had the opposite effect. By centralizing the authority of the 'ulamā' the government increased their own ability to manipulate the institutions of the 'ulamā' and to control official 'ulamā' proclamations, or *fatāwā.* In addition, by the twentieth century this very manipulation led people to distrust among the people of any 'ulamā' who held an official position. Yet, the 'ulamā' who served as officials of al-Azhar were individually able to benefit financially as individuals as a result of their increased institutionalized influence, which is why they often did not oppose governmental reforms.[255]

Gamal Abdul Nasser (President of Egypt from 1956 until his death in 1970) instituted a startling reshaping of al-Azhar between the years of 1952 to 1961, which represented the culmination of the process begun by Muhammad Ali. To begin with Nasser created a new ministry of the government to deal with the remaining *waqf* lands,

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[254] Moustafa, "Conflict and Cooperation between the State and Religious Institutions in Contemporary Egypt," p. 4.
[255] See Hatina, "Historical Legacy and the Challenge of Modernity in the Middle East: The Case of al-Azhar in Egypt," pp. 51-68.

thereby placing all ‘ulamā funding under the control of a government bureaucracy. In 1955 Nasser abolished the sharī‘a courts. Nasser’s establishment of a new law in 1961 introduced the most radical changes to the structure of al-Azhar until that time. It placed al-Azhar under the control of the Minister of Endowments, essentially giving the president and government ministers control over the hiring and firing of al-Azhar employees and control over the finances of the institution.[256] The law of 1961 also changed the education at al-Azhar by expanding al-Azhar’s colleges from the three dealing with religious sciences (Qu’ran, law and the Arabic language) to include colleges devoted to the study of scientific subjects. The addition of secular learning to al-Azhar’s curriculum had been advocated by many reformist ‘ulamā’ since Muhammad ‘Abduh. But the addition of these faculties of learning had unforeseen negative effects on the ‘ulamā’ because it weakened religious training by draining resources away from the religious colleges.[257] An al-Azhar education, although still respected, does not carry the weight it once did because the religious education is not as strong as it once was.[258]

Colonial forms of education, propelled by European missionary zeal, also undermined the ‘ulamā’’s jurisdiction by graduating a new type of learned student who

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[256] Moustafa, “Conflict and Cooperation,” has an in depth discussion of the 1961 reforms and their implications on pp. 8-11, but he emphasizes the undermining of the authority of al-Azhar too widely. For a corrective to this view see Malika Zeghal, “Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulama of al-Azhar, Radical Islam, and the State (1952-94).” *International Journal of Middle Studies* 31, no. 3 (August 1999): pp. 371-399.

[257] Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work, pp. 25-30*. Also Zeghal, “Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulama of al-Azhar, Radical Islam, and the State,” pp. 371-399.

[258] See Moustafa, “Conflict and Cooperation,” pp. 9-10, for a discussion of how some late twentieth century ‘ulamā’ themselves viewed the 1961 law changing al-Azhar as undermining the quality of religious education.

competed with the ‘ulamā in the realm of knowledge.[259] After the colonial powers left Egypt, the Egyptian state continued to increase the program of secularized education. While these changes have often been represented as one of secular versus religious education, Gregory Starrett shows that the Egyptian government did not just offer scientific education to they public, they also introduced religious subjects to the public schools. The government, in fact, molded public schools with an eye to teaching students a particular brand of Islam, one which views the role of religion as separate from politics.[260] Further, Al-Azhar's introduction of secular subjects into its curriculum has resulted in both inferior scientific education and a less thorough religious education. Both of these developments-teaching religion in secular schools and teaching secular subjects in religious institutions- have resulted in blurring the lines between religious and secular specialties by removing the idea that in order to speak with authority in religious matters one needs to receive a special, specific type of education. As a result many secularly educated elites, from early in the twentieth century onward, have articulated their own visions of religious reform and revival even though they have possessed limited familiarity with the textual traditions of the past.

As Dale Eickelman and Gregory Starett have shown, mass education has offered Islam to Egyptians as one subject among many. Starrett, in particular, argues that this has given rise to explaining Islam as a system of practices and beliefs, objectifying a tradition

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[259] Hatina, *Historical Legacy and the Challenge of Modernity*, pp. 52-53.
[260] Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work*, pp. 30.

that is understood by practitioners to be more than a functioning system.[261] Others have seen the emphasis of systematizing beliefs into certain forms of practice, as a shift, rather than a complete break with the past. Either way this presentation of tradition engenders a need for religious material, both spoken and written, geared towards extending the limited religious education subjects receive in their public training. Interest in Islam is spurred through its objectification, which is taught by teachers who are not religiously trained, but if students want more in depth information they must seek it on their own. All of this has opened the public to accepting that religious knowledge can be gained outside the realm of traditional religious institutions such as al-Azhar. The decentralizing of religious instruction has also made it acceptable for people to receive religious knowledge and instruction from those in secular fields. These two concomitant movements towards the de-specialization of religious knowledge rely both on releasing religious knowledge from its previously embedded forms of authenticity, and on raising secular learning to a level once reserved for religious specialists. The concept of ʻilm, as a religious science, has also shifted in the contemporary period because it has become so generalized. Consequently, many secularly trained individuals have claimed the right to be the learned representatives of theological understanding.[262]

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[261] Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work*, chapter 2. Starrett directly connects this presentation of religion in public education to Qutb's notion of religion as a manhaj. Also see Eickelman, *Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies*, p.257.

[262] One popular preacher whose sermons were televised in the same era as Shaʻrāwī was Mustafa Mahoud. Mahmoud was trained as a medical doctor. See Armando Salvatore, "Social Differentiation, Moral Authority and Public Islam in Egypt: The Path of Mustafa Mahmud," *Anthropology Today* 16, no. 2 (Apr., 2000): pp. 12-15. Salvatore claims that Mahmud was second in popularity only to Shaʻrāwī.

➢ Preaching As A Means 'Ulamā' Resurgence

There is no doubt that changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries weakened the influence of the 'ulamā' as disseminators of religius knowledge and also left their stature among the people greatly damaged. But it is also true that in the late twentieth century, with the rise of men like Sha'rāwī, the 'ulamā' were able to carve out a place for themselves as disseminators of religious knowledge in the contemporary world. They did so by continuously relying on, and expanding, their vocation as preachers, an effort that was aided by the social and political situation in Egypt at the time. During this period the political systems of nationalism and socialism, which were supposed to improve the lives of the people of Egypt, had failed miserably. Once European inspired changes failed, Egyptians were motivated to once again look to their own religious tradition for guidance on how to improve their lives.[263] In the late twentieth century many Egyptian Muslims began to seek guidance on how to live rightly guided lives, which in turn created an opening for those offering religious guidance in this new context, such as, but not limited to, the 'ulamā'.

Even though the 'ulamā' have been said to be weak both intellectually and institutionally, too submissive to the government and unable to deal with social change,

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[263] We have to be careful here not to see this as a clean break between a time when people were attached to religion and a time when they broke from this attachment only to, in the late twentieth century, call for a "return" to the precepts of Islam. In the first instance it was a top down imposition of secular systems replacing religious ones, as we have explored. The "return" to religion was then not so much a return as a protest against this imposition and an assertion (coming from many different arenas) that the woes of society have been caused by the establishment of foreign systems and so can be corrected by indigenous systems, such as those that can be gleaned from Islam. While no clean break was made, the idea of the need for such a restructuring was novel and it opened the way for many different conceptions of how that restructuring should be accomplished.

the ‘ulamā’ have always been politically and socially relevant.[264] Malika Zeghal claims that although the ‘ulamā’ have lost their economic and political independence, Nasser’s modernization attempts did not deal the final blow to the ‘ulamā’ but actually helped them to re-emerge as powerful political actors.[265] While Nasser’s tight control over the ‘ulamā’ had the desired effect of muffling their public voices at first, by the 1980’s and 1990’s the situation had reversed because Egypt’s President now needed the ‘ulamā’ to counter more extremist voices. Although the strengthening, and even in some cases radicalizing, of Islamist groups in Egypt is generally seen as undermining ‘ulamā’ authority, these groups have unwittingly added to the ‘ulamā’’s reemergence. By the late twentieth century as the influence of Islamism, especially in its more radical forms, increased so did the threat to the legitimacy of the Egyptian government on religious grounds. As a result, during the presidency of Anwar Sadat, the government decided that it needed the scholars of al-Azhar and their brand of moderate Islam to counter these threats. They began to rely on the more politically neutral ‘ulamā’ but they also realized the necessity of reinforcing the ‘ulamā’ status as possessors of religious authority. In turn the ‘ulamā’ were able to use this new need to their advantage, both to secure their place as public actors and to assert the relevance of their programs in contrast to, or sometimes even within, various Islamist groups.

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[264] Zeghal, *Gardiens de l’Islam. Le oulémas d’al-Azhar dans l’Egypte Contemporaine*, p. 370. Zaman, *The ‘Ulamā’ in Contemporary Islam*, The beginning of chapter 6 focuses on the ‘ulamā’ in Egypt.

[265] Zeghal, *Gardiens de l’Islam. Le oulémas d’al-Azhar dans l’Egypte Contemporaine*, p. 373.

The mixed result of increased government control of the ‘ulamā’ in Egypt and the way it curtailed some of their power but also offered them opportunities, is also exemplified in the realm of finances. The government exercised greater and greater control over the finances of al-Azhar but they also infused the institution with money.[266] The number of mosques being built also increased during the late twentieth century. So while the government tried to control the ‘ulamā’ through financial measures the increases in money and mosques ultimately made the Azhari ‘ulamā’ more independent, most notably in their public function as preachers. This offered the ‘ulamā’ a newly expanded opportunity to use preaching, especially in the mosques, to reinvigorate their roles as leaders of the people in religious matters. Even though the government did try to exercise more control over what was said from the *minbar* (pulpit), by, for example, giving preachers a list of acceptable topics for their Friday sermons, they were incapable of monitoring everything that was said. For this reason preaching became a major avenue for alternative, not governmentally sanctioned, religious discourse.

Preaching has also been used as a means of disseminating religious knowledge by many who preach outside of the context of the mosque and by many non-‘ulamā’ scholars. These new preachers either compete with, or else complement, the messages of the more centrist ‘ulamā’, depending on the specific content of their sermons and lessons. Another path used by both official and unofficial preachers and teachers to reach the public is through the media, mainly television and cassette tapes. Cassette tapes have

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[266] See Moustafa, “*Conflict and Cooperation,*” p. 6.

tended to be the medium favored by those preaching non-sanctioned messages, for obvious reasons. They can be easily copied and spread from person to person and there isn't much the government can do about it. Therefore the majority of cassette messages are focused on edification for the purposes of putting forth a particular "ethical and political" program.[267] Egyptian television preachers, on the other hand, depend on the Egyptian government if they want to broadcast religious messages because all non-satellite television in Egypt is government owned and controlled. This does not mean that those who are sanctioned by the government are actually controlled by the government. Instead men like Shaykh Sha‘rāwī can be characterized as preaching a message which focuses on spiritual and religious edification instead of on political or ideological ideas. This was exactly what the government was looking for in Sha‘rāwī and it is what gave him the freedom to say what he wanted within his realm of expertise, as we saw in chapter two with the example of his speech to President Mubarak.

In the present, as well as in the past, preaching has served as a means by which the ‘ulamā’ and others have been able to reach people with independent messages. Furthermore, new technology has allowed messages to proliferate and has added to the ‘ulamā’'s ability to carve out a place for themselves in the public sphere. This again represents something both old and new because preaching has always been a part of the ‘ulamā’repertoire, although in the past official ‘ulamā’ usually used it to reinforce a

[267] For more on cassette tape listening see Charles Hirshkind, *Ethical Soundscapes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). On the role of cassettes in the Iranian Revolution see Ali Mohammadi and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammad, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1994).

normative vision of Islam. Today however many vocal and popular ‘ulamā’ also find themselves in new roles, aligned with new groups, and even when not directly aligned, associated with new types of movements, such as the da‘wā movement in Egypt. Although thoroughly steeped in a past concept, this movement is today decidedly modern. This is because this movement has transformed the meaning of da‘wā itself by asserting that every Muslim must accept the responsibility to guide any believer he or she sees straying from the teachings of Islam. Da‘wā still means a call, but it now accepts that this call can come from any perceived pious person. It has also taken on other meanings. These meanings include social activism, mosque building, educational practices, but also calling Muslims "to greater proper religious practice" and in Egypt is now associated with "enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong." [268] These new meanings shift the focus of responsibility from the community to individual Muslims to teach correct conduct, a trend begun by Rashīd Riḍa. In addition even though the movement is religiously based, it is centered on the necessity of living a correctly pious life, it completely by passes the need for an ‘ulamā’ class, offering its own normative vision. This has led to the assumption that such movements contribute to the loss of ‘ulamā authority in religious matters.

While it appears that such a statement is true, one must look deeper to discover how the ‘ulamā’ have taken this threat and asserted themselves within it. Saba Mahmood claims that the *dā‘iyāt* in modern Egypt have as much authority as was previously

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[268] See Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety,* pp. 57-59, for a geneology of the term and its changed understanding today.

reserved for the ʻulamā.[269] She goes as far as to say that secular universities have been producing the most prominent *dā'iyāt* of the last century. And while she may be correct in terms of preachers who are directly associated with the movement itself, she completely overlooks men like Shaykh Sha'rāwī, Muḥammad Ghazālī, Yūsuf Qarāḍawī and Abdul Hamīd Kishk, who command the largest audiences for their outreach and admonition. In fact no clear separation between *dā'iyāt* and ʻulamā exists today. ʻUlamā-preachers, trained at al-Azhar, like Shaykh Sha'rāwī, Muḥammad Ghazālī, Yūsuf Qarāḍawī and Abdul Hamīd Kishk, each a preacher with a distinctive message, have become known not just as men with religious knowledge but also as *dā'iyāt*.

As an example, Sha'rāwī was always introduced in his television interviews and labeled on the cover of his books as *imām al-du 'ā*, the leader of the summoners. But this was not a reference to either the past understanding of that word or to his time as Minister of Da'wā. It instead refers to his time as a preacher, after he left government employ, when he admonished believers, teaching them the correct way to live their lives. This represents a merging of the modern notion of da'wā with the traditional role of the preacher. In some ways it exemplifies how categories that academics consider separate are in practice seen as complimentary and therefore naturally overlap. In addition this merging also attests to the fact that the ʻulamā now share the responsibility of being religious guides for the people, in this case sharing it with every other Muslim. But the fact that an ʻalim like Sha'rāwi, using his traditional role as a preacher, came to be

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[269] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 63.

considered the most effective preacher within this new formulation of admonition is also due to his ability to adapt to new circumstances. His role came to be understood in a new way because he took specific steps to engender this effectiveness, by leaving his government position, utilizing new media, and by offering people religious solutions to the problems they face every day.

Although the 'ulamā' did lose a certain amount of authority among the people because of their capitulations to the government, this has mostly affected the higher echelon of 'ulamā', ministers and directors of various religious departments, especially those who are officially government employees. This stratum includes those who issue fatāwā in favor of government policy, and those who have been associated with other forms of corruption. Even though the Egyptian public today is more apprehensive about trusting what comes out of al-Azhar, this has not tarnished the reputation of every 'alim. As we saw in the last chapter with the Wasatiyya movement in Egypt, even the discourse of influential Islamist intellectuals, another group which has been be seen as a threat the authority of the 'ulamā, is actually controlled by members of the 'ulamā'. This provides yet another example of how the 'ulamā' in Egypt have navigated in a changed environment to take advantage of what at first appears to undermine their authority.[270]

The effect of the 'ulamā' repositioning also proved influential in the emergence of new types of 'ulamā', who were not only more vocal but also diversified in new ways.

[270] See Raymond Baker, *Islam Without Fear* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), introduction for how some 'ulamā' have joined with what he calls the "new Islamists" through which they are having an impact on society.

This diversity differs from the way we examined diversity in the pre-modern era because, as we saw above, the circumstances surrounding the undermining of ‘ulamā authority presented completely new challenges to, and therefore new responses from, the ‘ulamā’. Malika Zeghal has shown that the Azhari ‘ulamā’ especially in the late twentieth century, were not a cohesive entity, all supporting the same vision of the role of Islam in society. Zeghal emphasizes the difference between the “periphery” ‘ulamā, those trained at al-Azhar but showing sympathies for Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood (for example Muḥammad Ghazālī and Yūsuf Qarāḍawī), and the “center” ‘ulamā, those who stayed within acceptable apolitical bounds (for example Sha‘rāwī).[271] Despite this diversity, the public discourses that arose amongst both the periphery and the center ‘ulamā’ still reflected their function as religious guides of the people. Although some periphery ‘ulamā’ became directly involved in formulating social and political ideals, ultimately they did so as the specially licensed and educated elite of their society. The rise of the periphery ‘ulamā’ also constituted a trend among those educated at al-Azhar from 1961 onward, of organizing their authority around notions of political and social change. Zeghal’s separation of the two types of ‘ulamā’ is interesting for this reason. But her conclusion that it was only the periphery ‘ulamā’, because of their activism, who have been effective, is incorrect.

Zeghal does not look in depth at the center ‘ulamā’ because of the way she separates the ‘ulamā’ into periphery and center, and then assumes effectiveness based on

[271] Zeghal, *Religion and Politics in Egypt*, p. 380. She also points out it was the mixing of education, secular and religious, which actually led to the creation of the peripheral ‘ulamā.

this separation. But Zeghal makes a mistake in not seriously considering an ‘alim like Sha‘rāwī merely because he did not formulate his program around social and political change. The periphery ‘ulamā’ were not the only ones reasserting themselves in the late twentieth century. Sha‘rāwī also established a new type of influence for himself in this context by serving as an example of the importance of the ‘ulamā’ as religious mediators and transmitters of religious knowledge. And even though he did not formulate his program around notions of society his influence did extend beyond the religious, but through the religious. Sha‘rāwī represented an important and meaningful shift in how the ‘ulamā’ generally continue to provide religious guidance to the people and therefore in how Egyptian Muslims practice and think about the meaning of religion in their lives.

It is perhaps more accurate to characterize the distinction between the two types of ‘ulamā’ Zeghal discusses in terms of the emphasis of their programs, or when considering preachers, in terms of their messages to the people. Let’s consider the distinction between Shaykh Sha‘rāwī and Yūsuf Qarāḍawī. While both understood that the role of the ‘ulamā’ as the guardians of religious knowledge needed to be reaffirmed and both did so through the method of preaching, they formulated their approaches to this reaffirmation in very different ways. For Qarāḍawī the ‘ulamā’ are the only class of Muslims capable of formulating an Islamic awakening (*al-ṣaḥwa al-islāmiyya*). Qarāḍawī reaffirms the centrality of the ‘ulamā’ as possessors of a specific type of knowledge (that of the true “foundations of Islam”) at the same time he limits the ‘ulamā’’s voice by only applying the usefulness of their knowledge to social and political

"movements."[272] The notion that the expertise of the 'ulamā' should be used for the purposes of such movements is an interesting modification of 'ulamā' jurisdiction and importance. Qarāḍawī also gives the 'ulamā charge over the definition of Islam, which in one sense reinforces their role as directors of the religion. Yet, in another sense it limits 'ulamā jurisdiction because viewing Islam as a definable entity means that the 'ulamā' have authority only within that definition. What about, for example, the aspects of knowledge that are related to theological truths and cosmology? Do the 'ulamā' have authority to speak about those? In addition viewing knowledge as systematic limits it to being geared towards the teleological, as something that can be acquired through any type of learning. This places secular and religious knowledge on an equal footing in terms of how a student becomes proficient in either.

The difference between such a formulation and that of an 'alim like Sha'rāwī can be summed up by this very issue. Sha'rāwī's emphasis was not only on transmitting "derived knowledge" concerning religious obligations (see Ghazālī's categorizations of knowledge above). Sha'rāwī believed that knowledge is eternally revealed through the texts and therefore the 'ulamā are needed to bridge the gap between the constant disclosure of God's knowledge and what that disclosure means for the people. By placing theological concerns at the center of his program, he called for a shift in how Egyptians perceive and acquire knowledge in the contemporary world. But in order to accomplish

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[272] Salvatore, *Political Discourse,* pp. 250. Although Salvatore overlooks Qarāḍawī's emphasis on the legal role of the 'ulamā' I think even after adding this element we can still claim that Qarāḍawī is limiting the realm of 'ulamā' authority.

this he had to preach on matters, such as epistemological understandings, not usually explicated by an ʻalim-preacher for the public at large.

➢ Shaykh Shaʻrāwī's Theory of Knowledge: Displaying Modern ʻUlamā' Authority.

In looking at one aspect of Shaʻrāwī's preaching, his theory of knowledge, we will try to find evidence of how, for him, understanding God as the source of all knowledge was paramount. This led him to posit a hierarchy associated with different ways of knowing and with those who claim expertise in any area of knowledge. In Shaʻrāwī's hierarchy, God's knowledge, and by extension those with expertise in interpreting theological intentions through revelation, is placed above all types of human knowledge by encompassing them. By giving precedence to the theological in his epistemology Shaʻrāwī made all knowledge completely dependent on God's system and subject to God's control. He thereby posited that in order for believers to gain any surety in knowledge they must begin by gaining insight into God's system of knowledge as it has been laid out in revelation. For this purpose they need the guidance of someone who can interpret and explain the Qur'an, and Shaʻrāwī was the living example of such a guide. Moreover, Shaʻrāwī said that anyone who has expertise in any realm associated with the non-theological (what Shaʻrāwī would call *basharī,* that associated with the secular aspects of human knowledge) should not disclose information about God's system. Shaʻrāwī refuted the possibility that those trained in secular knowledge can be trusted to explicate the Qur'an. Instead he affirmed that only religious experts, those

specially trained, could serve as intermediaries between the revelation and the people. He did so through his epistemology and as an example of a representative of his hermeneutic tradition. Sha'rāwī displayed the absolute necessity of the religious expert to extract knowledge applicable to the modern context from God's disclosure, as it was deposited in the revelation to be brought forth for his time. This is exactly how, in his epistemology, Sha'rāwi reinforced the necessity of the hermeneutics of those specially trained in the religious sciences; by answering the question of why the 'ulamā, and no one else, were appropriate guides for believers in the modern era.

Sha'rāwī chose this complicated subject because of the necessity to reassert the importance of theological knowledge in the arena of so much competition (as explored above) and because this competition was manifested in the lives of his audience, threatening their acceptance of theological claims. By offering his epistemology to the people he added to his demonstration of 'ulamā necessity because he was also able to decipher the every day in terms of theological ideas. In formulating a response to threats in the modern period, which in large part, for Sha'rāwī, stemmed from the way theological truths had been abandoned for scientific truths, he showed that only someone with his level of understanding could offer the correct formula for thinking about these matters. We will conclude the chapter by searching his epistemology for signs of both how he established the primacy of knowledge gleaned from the divine revelation and how, in so doing, he substantiates 'ulamā necessity while displaying modern 'ulamā' authority.

➢ Making Knowledge Theological

First it is important to examine how Sha'rāwī grounded his epistemology in theological concepts in order to remind the people that all verifiable knowledge, human and divine, is deposited in the revelation, and that therefore God is the source of all knowledge. This premise helped Sha'rāwī demonstrate the indispensability of the 'ulamā' as those who have been, and continue to be, uniquely positioned in every generation to search the revelation. Shaykh Sha'rāwī's theory of knowledge rests on the bipartite division of knowledge between human and divine as discussed in the beginning of the chapter. He also relied on the proposition that although there is a difference between human and divine knowledge, they are interconnected and for the purposes of human acquisition of verifiable knowledge, interdependent. Furthermore, Sha'rāwī stressed that God's knowledge has no boundaries, because God is both the master of *al-shahāda* (the exoteric-the dominion of the seen, witnessed, or experienced, but I will also translate it as disclosed to come closest to Sha'rāwī's meaning) and *al-ghayb* (the esoteric- the dominion of the unseen, transcendental, hidden, and concealed). In contrast for Sha'rāwī human beings are limited in their knowledge of both realms, especially in the realm of the unseen. Sha'rāwī taught that the hidden realm is comprised of the jinn, angels, all that comes down unto earth or alights up to heaven, and the *barzakh* (isthmus, the place between this world and the next), judgment, the last day, heaven and hell, life after death, and all that is veiled from humanity about the past and future and by space.

God knows all of the unseen and every disclosed event that has, or will, happen in the earth, from the smallest leaf falling to the larger occurrences.[273] In addition before creating the universe God had knowledge about all that would happen in it. Sha‘rāwī explained this by saying that just as we define the goal before we undertake a task, so God assigned a purpose for everything. Added to the things outside of time and place that God knows, Sha‘rāwī also stated that God knows all things in the universe because he measured everything before he created it. Hence, Sha‘rāwī posited that everything existed in God's knowledge as a precise model even before being substantiated in creation.

> "In order for God to have created it its creation must have been a part of his knowledge as God has been the creator prior to the existence of anything he created. Because he engendered (*awjad*) and created by his (divine) quality *(bi ṣifati)*. As the creator, [God's] attributes have existed eternally (without a beginning) after which the creation was engendered. In the same way all of God's attributes were pre-eternal. God has been compassionate (*raḥīm*) prior to the existence of one who deserves compassion *(al-raḥma).* And [God has been] the provider prior to the existence of one who needs provision. This is [the nature] of God's attributes."[274]

For Sha‘rāwī all things in the disclosed world existed first in the invisible world, and therefore when God says "be and it is," it means God says "be" to something that already exists in the esoteric realm. This is precisely how God brings everything hidden into the

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[273] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha‘rāwī, *Al-Ghayb,* pp. 107-124.
[274] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha‘rāwi, *Al-Ghayb*, p 114.

open to be witnessed. Based on this premise Sha'rāwī believed that in the Qur'an God gave every unseen thing a perceptible image in order to elucidate it for the mind.[275]

It is here that we begin to see the mystical side of Sha'rāwī's thought, which in this case coincides with the notion that there is unity in being because all things existed with God before creation, therefore all of existence is a part of God. Sha'rāwī did not go into detail about this theory not only because it is a very complicated philosophical and theological proposition for the general public, but also because it is controversial.[276] What he was clear about is the absolute and complete nature of God's knowledge and how this reinforces notions about the unity of God. Additionally, Sha'rāwī was not just connecting what we witness to God's knowledge and purposes, he was positing that because God is the source of knowledge, every verifiable particular is part of God's dominion and jurisdiction. By confirming that God's dominion includes all that we see and do, Sha'rāwī postulated a hierarchy of knowledge in which knowledge of divine purposes must be primary to all other ways that human beings become cognizant of the universe.

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[275] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwi, *Al-Ghayb*, p 115.

[276] His thought here resembles the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* , the unity of being. W*aḥdat al-wujūd* is a, "doctrine formulated by the school of Ibn al-Arabi , which postulates that God and His creation are one, since all that is created preexisted in God's knowledge and will return to it, making mystical union with God possible. This was a problematic doctrine for legalist interpreters of Islam such as the Wahhabis, (and all Sunnis) who held to a strict interpretation of tawhid that did not permit anyone or anything to be associated or in union with God." "*Wahdat al-Shuhūd*." In The Oxford Dictionary of Islam Online , ed., John L. Esposito, http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2465 (accessed Apr 14, 2009). Also see Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam Volume 2,* pp. 462-467. Hodgson explains w*aḥdat al-wujūd* as the, "ontological oneness of being" and as "unitive metaphysics." He also gives historical background to how this term was used and rejected in the "Later Middle Period" of Islam 1250-1500. We will look further at Sha'rāwī's mystical leanings in the next chapter.

When Sha‘rāwī stated that it takes God's command to bring forth knowledge from the hidden to the witnessed world he included the discoveries we make with our minds because we do not gain new knowledge by our endeavors alone. Sha‘rāwī believed that new scientific discoveries are made because God brings something out of the unseen thereby making it possible for human beings to witness it. This is why Sha‘rāwī claimed that scientific postulations can be judged according to disclosed knowledge contained in the Qur'an. As knowledge is brought forth (*yabdī)* from the unseen to the seen it will also become apparent in the verses of the Qur'an and is thereby verifiable.[277] According to Sha‘rāwī no secular knowledge can be properly understood (or verified) without first understanding its connection to its divine origins.[278]

It is clear that with these ideas Sha‘rāwī was informing his audience that while human understanding is vital, it is completely dependent on divine intervention and verification. All knowledge gained must be understood in the light of the revelation, because for Sha‘rāwī, the Qur'an contains all information. Anything God brings from the esoteric realm to be witnessed will be referred to in the Qur'an. As explored with the notion of renewal in chapter 3, Sha‘rāwī held that the Qur'an is infinite in its ability to provide guidance, even though humans can only extract from it what is appropriate to

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[277] Even though all knowledge is verifiable by the Qur'an Sha‘rāwī also cautioned that the Qur'an should not be used as a textbook to prove scientific facts as this is not the Qur'an's purpose because it is a book of guidance. For him using the Qur'an this way could also be damaging because scientific theories are always changing. But he also said that if science is teaching something against the Qur'an then it must be challenged and shown to be false because it is relying on human knowledge and God's knowledge as revealed in the Qur'an can never be wrong. This difference seems slight, but it places maintaining the veracity of the Qur'an above the need to prove (or disprove) scientific theories.
[278] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha‘rāwi, *Al-Ghayb*, pp. 45-59.

their times or what has been clarified in history. Here we see an extension of this belief in which Sha'rāwī contends that human beings can only utilize what is appropriate to their times because that which people of successive generations will find in the Qur'an has not been brought forth yet by God and so remains hidden, in actualization, and also in the Qur'an.

Hence, Sha'rāwī offered a very distinctive and effective critique of secular ways of knowing, through which he reinforced the importance of engagement with theological understanding through the Qur'an. For Sha'rāwī human knowledge can never be right if it opposes God's knowledge, or has not been first disclosed by God. Therefore the truth must be discovered in revelation in order to decipher it in terms of God's disclosures to humanity and in terms of its greater purpose in being revealed. In the same way he considered human knowledge limited in general, even about non-religious subjects, because there are many things which are kept hidden from human beings and are only known to God, some of which will be disclosed at a future time. Sha'rāwī believed that only knowledge gleaned from the Qur'an can be trusted as true knowledge that originated with God before it was brought forth from the esoteric to be disclosed.

Thus, Sha'rāwī affirmed the necessity of interpreting the Qur'an afresh in every generation, and by extension for renewers who could be trusted with the task because of their knowledge, and their engagement with the Islamic tradition of exegesis (*tafsīr*). This is exactly what Sha'rāwī did in his preaching, he used his skill to extract the truth from the Qur'an, interpreting it according to definitive methods, in order to bring forth

newly disclosed knowledge. Hence, Sha'rāwī was described to me as the renewer (*mujaddid*) of the twentieth century, because his disciples saw him as the one who updated the message of the Qur'an for the scientific and technological age.[279] Since his renewed exegesis did not reject past attempts to apply revelatory knowledge to the temporal and mundane, Sha'rāwī affirmed the necessity of the hermeneutic tradition of exegesis to continue into the future.

To clarify this Sha'rāwī used the law as an example. Laws are made with our limited knowledge based on what we as individuals have seen within our own time. But as time goes on the laws must be changed according to what God has brought from the hidden realm since that time. Therefore what is kept hidden from us is always greater than what is revealed. Furthermore, those making decisions are limited by the little they know about what is visible to them and by their complete lack of knowledge about the hidden.[280] Ultimately Sha'rāwī posits that in both realms we are completely dependent on God for disclosing knowledge and on religious experts to explain what has been disclosed in every generation.

In all of the aspects of his theory that we have explored above, God's control, how God brings forth knowledge form the unseen to the seen, how new information is really gained, and especially how the Qur'an verifies all of this, Sha'rāwī was not only reminding the people that God controls the universe but also that in order for knowledge to be gained an intermediary between God's disclosures and how the people understand

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[279] Interview, 'Abd al-Ra'ūf, Cairo, June, 2008.
[280] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Al-Qaḍa' wal Qadr (Al-Qāhira: Akhrār al-Yom, 1993*), pp. 104-107.

those disclosures is needed. By explaining how these changes are revealed in the Qur'an he served as that intermediary, displaying his unique authority as a religious expert according to his knowledge of the revelation. Moreover, by stating that God's disclosures are constant, and that new knowledge is disclosed throughout history, he was teaching that religious experts are needed in every generation to interpret that knowledge for the people. As a religious scientist Sha'rāwī was capable of presenting newly disclosed knowledge for the people through his interpretations of the Qur'an, hence he also served as an intermediary between the primary truth and all other ways of knowing. By placing theological understanding at the top of his hierarchy of exoteric knowledge Sha'rāwī's also wanted to show the people that scientific and rational knowledge that contradicted the Qur'an could be disputed.

Sha'rāwī's hierarchy of knowledge was also demonstrated in his belief that there was a distinction between how human beings come to know divine truths as opposed to how other types of expertise are gained. As we saw Sha'rāwī believed that human knowledge, as religious knowledge, begins with God's book and the Sunna of Muḥammad and that from these sources God's method can be discerned. But he also labeled all other types of human knowledge *bashari*, secular. So, for example, according to him there is a great difference between political and religious thought. Each represents different types of knowledge because they are derived from different sources. Politics is

comprised of human thought but in religion the words come from God.[281] For Sha‘rāwī it is the expert in any area of disclosed knowledge who must be relied on to provide an understanding of that subject because he/she is the only one who has attained valuable and correct information. Hence, the one who provides understanding of religious matters must be an expert in the field of religious knowledge. This reinforces the necessity of the ‘ulamā’ in the face of competition from those who have expertise in areas that have already been disclosed but who rely on the secular aspects of human knowledge.

As the final proof of the necessity of the ‘ulamā’ in the midst of so many other specialists Sha‘rāwī showed why secularly trained specialists can not be relied on to provide religious understanding. What he said was that just as those engaged in divine knowledge cannot use their expertise for secular purposes, those who use human thoughts as their source should not engage in speculation about the divine. In a political context this means that for Sha‘rāwī religious groups should not have political goals and political groups should not have religious goals. As he said: "Politics is the struggle of human thought against other human thought. But religion subjects human thought to heavenly thought."[282] Sha‘rāwī disputed scientific thought the same way. In the course of challenging theories of evolution Sha‘rāwī claimed that God placed an added restriction on those who look to the material world (scientists) to find proofs about how God created humanity:

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[281]Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha‘rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī. *Al-Shaykh al- Sha‘rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīṃah*,, p. 45.
[282] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha‘rāwī in interviews given to Maḥmūd Fawzī. *Al-Shaykh al- Sha‘rāwī: Min al-Qaryah ilā al-Qīṃah*,, p. 49.

> "Why does God say: 'I do not take those who are led astray (*al-muḍalīn*) as helpers?' (Qur'an: Kahf, 18:51) This is a warning to the heedless (*al-mutaghāfilīn*) who use philosophical means to [explain] the particularities (*kayfiyya*) of creation. … God wants to place impediments (*ḥajrān*) in the mouth of every one of the misguided by setting up proofs [of what they can not know] in the material universe . He does not silence those materialists. However they are not able to speak about this (those things which God has hidden from them). To those we say God's creation of man has been concealed (*ghaībān*) from before we have known ourselves."[283]

According to Sha'rāwī by leaving the answers to material questions (such as the creation of humanity) hidden from material proof and only revealing them in the Qur'an, God has exposed how the materialists are limited even in the area of their expertise. Ultimately they are claiming to know what God has kept hidden, but scientist and philosophers can never know God's secrets, this, as we will see in the next chapter, is reserved for those who are granted knowledge by God. But because God does not take them as helpers, materialists have no means to approach either what has been revealed in the Qur'an but not in science, or the esoteric. In contrast what Sha'rāwī did was to offer a new interpretation of this verse, based on his access to God's disclosure through the Qur'an about a twentieth century reality. He asserted that the Qur'an contains an argument for disputing twentieth century threats to its veracity, since in this sermon he is specifically arguing against theories of evolution in order to reaffirm that God is the creator of the universe.[284]

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[283] Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fī Tarbīat al-Insān*, pp. 7-8.
[284] Sha'rāwī specifically says that those who believe in evolution serve the purpose of proving the veracity of the verse, since the Qur'an predicted that they would come along. Thus the superiority of Quranic knowledge is demonstrable because the Qur'an predicted the rise of science and its false assumptions about God. Hence, scientific knowledge when it contradicts the Qur'an is necessary because it proves the

Sha‘rāwī demonstrated that when those who are “led astray” are corrected by those who have knowledge of the Qur’an, they serve to bring believers to the truth by necessitating that Quranic knowledge be brought forth. For Sha‘rāwī those who doubt God are only a threat if they are not properly understood as necessary to lead the believer to inquire about the truth, thereby aiding the affirmation of her trust in God and the Qur’an. It was of crucial importance to Sha‘rāwī that what God has kept hidden serves as impediments to the arguments of the materialists because it shows that they cannot elucidate completely on the matter from a position outside of God’s knowledge as revealed in the Qur’an. Only the Qur’an, which tells us that the origins of creation are with God, can be trusted. Once a believer accepts the premise that the only certain knowledge is that which comes from the revelation, or is verified by the revelation; then logically it is clear that science has not proven all of the aspects of creation. This confirms Sha‘rāwī’s point that God has limited the ability of scientists to possess knowledge about the physical world by keeping certain maters hidden until such time as he brings them from the esoteric realm into the realm of the knowable. When God does disclose knowledge it becomes evident in the Qur’an, hence only the Quranic expert is the one who can dispute scientific theories if they are false.

For those who accept and believe that the test of true knowledge is how that knowledge stands up when seen in the light of the words of revelation, Sha‘rāwī leads them to reject real threats to their faith, in this case threats that are posed by materialist

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veracity of the Qur’an. All knowledge, true and false, serves God’s purposes. Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha‘rāwī, *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥmān*, p. 7-11.

thinking. By putting forth such an argument Sha‘rāwī reinforces the idea that revelation is the only source to be trusted to regulate not only normative behaviors and beliefs but also ideas about every aspect of life. Although this explanation is of course scripturalist, it neither sets up an irreconcilable difference between religion and science, nor takes an apologetic approach by defending Quranic verses. Instead Sha‘rāwī articulated that science without revelation can not be implicitly trusted. This is where a modern scientific mind would find fault with Sha‘rāwī, perhaps based on Sha‘rāwī's own argument. If the expert in religion should be trusted to explicate theological matters then the scientist should be trusted to explicate scientific matters. But this view assumes that God only controls certain areas of knowledge, and as we saw, for Sha‘rāwī God controls all knowledge. Therefore it is the religious specialist whose knowledge takes precedence over all other experts.

Actually Sha‘rāwī stated there were two possibilities for explaining what happens when the Qur'an and science conflict. The first is that the Qur'an is right and science wrong and the second is that the Quranic verse in question has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. If the first example is the case then it is obvious that divine knowledge always trumps other types knowledge, which in this case must be incorrect. The second reinforces the continued need for ‘ulamā' interpreters, especially as preachers, to teach the people the correct interpretation and to mitigate confusion concerning correct belief.

Sha‘rāwi took as an example the Quranic verse: "And the earth, we have laid it out." (Al-Ḥijr 15:19) He said that some have misinterpreted this to mean that the Qur'an

asserts that the earth is flat and that because scientists have said that the earth is round, science is a lie. According to Sha‘rāwī those who believe this have misinterpreted the verse. The verse actually means that when human beings walk the earth what they see from any point on the earth is the land laid out in front of them. So when the verse says that the land is stretched out in front of human beings this is according to what they see, and does not mean that the earth itself is stretched out.[285] This argument of Sha‘rāwī's illustrates a common method of his Quranic interpretation, dependent on his knowledge of the Arabic language, because it is based on his understanding of the word *al-‘arḍ* which can mean either earth or land. Since Sha‘rāwī interprets it as land then the controversy is easily resolved. But Sha‘rāwī actually takes it a step further and states that this Quranic verse supports the scientific finding that the earth is spherical:

> "In this way when you go to any place on the *land* you will find it spread out in front of you (*mabsuṭa amāmaka*). This could not happen except if the earth was spherical (*kurawiyya*). But if it was a hexagon, a square, a triangle or any other shape then you would reach an edge [and in that case] you would not find the *land* out stretched (*mamdūd*) in front of you."[286]

For Sha‘rāwī this is an example of how God discloses knowledge through human discovery, here through scientific discovery and satellite pictures, of something that was previously hidden. Additionally this disclosure is verified through proper interpretation of the Qur'an.

There are two other interesting things to note about this example. First Sha‘rāwī's method for incorporating science depended on God bringing forth what was

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[285] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha‘rāwī, *Al-Ghayb*, chapter 3.
[286] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha‘rāwī, *Al-Ghayb*, pp. 60-61.

once hidden, which then prompted Sha‘rāwī as a specialist to search the Qur’an and reinterpret it where mistakes were made. Thus the Quranic search was prompted by the way the revelation had been interpreted by others and how that interpretation needed correcting, not by a need to prove the correctness of falsity of the scientific theory. If reinterpretation had been impossible then the scientific proof would have been assumed to be false or inadequate (as in the case of evolutionary theory) because in such a case the Qur’an always overrides science.[287] Second, the interpretive specialist is needed now more than ever for this process since, as we saw, scientists are limited in their knowledge and so may offer humanity faulty information that can weaken faith in God. For Sha‘rāwī human science, and human thought in general, are correct when used as an instrument of God, emanating originally from God’s desire. Human thought leads to mistakes when used in spite of God or in defiance of God, coming originally from human desire. Sha‘rāwī believed that human thought and reason are absolutely necessary for God’s plans to become manifest, but God’s plans must be properly understood first.

➢ Conclusion

We have examined the history of the role of the ‘ulamā’ as transmitters of knowledge, the nineteenth and twentieth century changes in the institutions and authority necessary to this role, and the adaptation of the ‘ulamā in the face of such threats.

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[287] Here we will note that when the Qur’an proves science wrong new interpretations of the Qur’an are used because past interpretations did not respond to scientific assumptions. Again this demonstrates the necessity of understanding the greater purposes of disclosed knowledge, or even of false assumptions, in order to elucidate God’s message in the revelation.

Through all of this we have seen that the authority of the ‘ulamā in Egypt has not been completely undermined by the forces of modernity. The changes that we looked at in the beginning of the chapter did not, as they were supposed to have, completely silence the ‘ulamā and make them irrelevant. Although it is true that the nature of their authority has changed through their loss of autonomy and through the co-opting of that authority by the government, men like Sha‘rāwī used the new situation to reinvent themselves as figures of authority through preaching. Sha‘rāwī's authority to speak from the texts rested on his official training, and his engagement with the discursive past, but it was also clear to him, and his followers, that what he was doing was something different. No longer was a preacher like Sha‘rāwī bound by past notions of proper preaching subjects and methods because he worked in a transformed context one filled with new types of competition.

Yet, he still relied on past formulations about the need for religious specialists, as in the way in which he exemplified how essential the ‘ulamā’ are as interpreters of divine texts, a point which can be seen throughout the exposition of his epistemology because the reinforcement of his own authority was woven into his message. By constantly relying on his authority as a man of knowledge engaged with the Islamic hermeneutical tradition, he was able to demonstrate the necessity of the religious specialist in his interpretations and understandings. For Sha‘rāwī Quranic interpreters had to be trained in the sciences of the Qur'an so that they could recognize the unfolding of God's will in history according to God's words in revelation. The ‘alim preacher was necessary to serve as an intermediary, delivering this disclosure to people.

Sha‘rāwī told his audience that the texts and signs of God are open to potential misunderstanding through faulty logic and the inappropriate use of the human mind (*‘aql)*; then by offering the correct knowledge he exemplified his own indispensability. He needed to reiterate the necessity of his expertise because many social and political forces were threatening his authority during his lifetime. By questioning human realms of thought and positing that all knowledge is theological, dependent on and originating from God, Sha‘rāwī linked epistemological understandings to theological understandings. By then grounding those understandings in how all knowledge is deposited in the Qur'an, he was essentially claiming that humanity is in constant need of intermediaries to decipher God's disclosures as history unfolds. Sha‘rāwī claimed that although the Qur'an is eternally true interpretations are not, therefore the Qur'an needs to be constantly searched for new understandings.

Nevertheless, because he claimed that even the best interpreters have limited ability, Sha‘rāwī's had to procure his authority as a Quranic exegete from more than his expertise in knowledge. As we have explored in this chapter Sha‘rāwī believed that any knowledge that comes from the human being is by its very nature incomplete. Therefore Sha‘rāwī's mastery of exoteric knowledge was combined with his pious life and, as we will explore in the next chapter, his insight into the esoteric realms of knowledge, to produce his special status among the people of Egypt.

Chapter Five

Authority Gained Through Apprehension of the Unseen

"What is *ikhlāṣ*? It is when the actions of the body agree with the actions of the heart. But when your body does something contrary to your heart this is not *ikhlāṣ*. *Ikhlāṣ* is something God keeps exclusively between himself and his creation. God said *ikhlāṣ* is the secret of my secrets I implant it into the heart of whomever I love of my slaves. No angels see it and write it down and no devil can spoil it because it is between a slave and his Lord."[288]

Introduction

This chapter will expand our understanding of Sha'rāwī's authority among the people by explaining how conceptions of his sanctity, and his formulation and implementation of ideas about hidden knowledge, strengthened his stature as a transmitter of religious instruction. As we saw in the last chapter by placing theological concerns at the center of his program, Sha'rāwī called for a shift in how Egyptians perceive and acquire knowledge in the contemporary world, calling them back to finding truth in the Qur'an. Through his Quranic interpretations he demonstrated that every generation needs a renewer, someone trained in the sciences of the Qur'an, as new information about existence is constantly being brought from the unseen world to be witnessed.

Sha'rāwī's concept of disclosed knowledge included the idea that all knowledge originates with God and is revealed by God, and that it takes a certain kind of expert to properly interpret it. Yet, because the disclosed and unseen are interdependent elements

[288] Shaykh Muḥammad Mitwalī Sha'rāwī in an interview given on Egyptian television in 1995.

in Sha‘rāwī’s epistemology they are also interdependent in the way he utilized his authority. Therefore, in the basic formulation of his epistemology in which he highlighted the interdependence of exoteric and esoteric knowledge, he also connected the authority of the religious guide to knowledge of the unseen realms. Furthermore, the manner in which he was perceived by the people allowed him to effectively intermingle these two concepts for the purposes of renewal.

How should we categorize esoteric knowledge as it pertains to the vocation of an ‘alim-preacher whose goal is to exhort people to properly worship God? Those Sufis who stress the ethical nature of the mystic path classify knowledge in the following manner: knowledge of God’s laws as they pertain to this life (exoteric), knowledge of the other world- an intuitive “inner” knowledge (esoteric)- and knowledge of God’s laws as they affect this world and the other world. The third classification is, “the true inner meaning of the cosmos,” which is the real goal of the gnostic.[289] These same Sufis presented esoteric knowledge as a science, claiming that it was the only complete science, since it presented this worldly and other-worldly knowledge as necessary elements of absolute comprehension.[290]

By connecting these realms and presenting them as incomplete without one another, these Sufis verified that both the exoteric and the esoteric are necessary for true understanding and illumination to occur. This strain of thought also remains grounded in the sensible world, the world of proper behavior divined from revelation, but posits that

[289] Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 178-179.
[290] Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 179-180.

this knowledge is incomplete without a supplemental engagement with the esoteric. According to this division and utilization of knowledge, the ‘ulamā’, those trained in the exoteric sciences, can also participate in the supernatural without contradicting their roles as scientists of religion, since the presence of both types of knowledge are absolutely necessary for true understanding to occur. Further, only those who have already mastered the exoteric sciences have the authority to approach the realm of God’s secrets.

Sha‘rāwī understood knowledge according to this same typology. During his lifetime, in the midst of so much instability and uncertainty about the derivation of knowledge, he reaffirmed that all knowledge, disclosed and hidden, is inextricably linked to God in its origination. This formulation recognized and relied upon the idea that because the exoteric is brought forth by God from the esoteric realms, in order for one to have comprehensive knowledge of the exoteric, she/he must also be acquainted with its source in the unseen. Hence, in his epistemology, Sha‘rāwi postulated that while the one who had full cognition of religious knowledge interpreted according to rational ways of knowing, he/she also needed to be informed by knowledge of the unseen. Sha‘rāwī himself used both his apprehension of what was concealed from others and his expertise in the disclosed sciences in his Quranic interpretations, and the people accepted his formulation and utilization of these two realms simultaneously in his sermons. In addition to his expositions about the unseen it was the acceptance of his sanctity among his followers that helped Sha‘rāwī establish his authority in the esoteric realm. The combination of his expertise with his knowledge and experience of the esoteric allowed

Sha'rāwī to stand out among others who competed with him in the realm of religious knowledge.

Sha'rāwī's apprehension of the secrets of the Qur'an could not be proven to the people; they had to trust that he had attained certain levels of insight in order to accept the elements of his teachings that relied on the special gifts God bestowed on him. Nevertheless, the acceptance of him as a godly man partially relied on his expertise as an 'alim, and his exemplary behavior (*adab*) and reputation as a devout worshipper. These were essential to conceptions of his intimacy with God. Hence insight into the unseen complimented Sha'rāwī's other areas of influence, his exemplary piety and his 'ulamā' credentials, to make his authority complete. It was through his association with these authoritative qualities that Sha'rāwī was recognized as one capable of reinterpreting the message of revelation for the people of his time. This highlights the necessary interdependence that perceived authority and the utilization of that authority display in the complicated role of the 'alim-preacher who serves as a renewer for his time.

➢ Catagories of Authority

The claim to religious authority in Islam is often connected to one of four characteristics of the Prophet Muḥammad. These four characteristics are as follows: "supernatural power, exemplar, lineage and transmitted religious knowledge."[291] Although Buehler states that in reality all religious authorities in Islam utilize some

[291] For this and the next references see Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, SC, 1998, chapter 1 on Sufi religious authority.

combination of these aspects to establish and use their authority, he also reiterates that each characteristic of authority is associated with a different type of religious actor. For example Buehler claims that in Sunni Islam both the ‘ulamā’ and the Sufis considered themselves heirs of the Prophets, but while the Sufis receive their authority from “lineage and experience” the ‘ulamā’ rely on “transmitted knowledge based on scriptural sources.”[292] Since his book is focused on Sufi authority Buehler only considers the ‘ulamā’ in their role as jurists, hence he has overlooked the influence that both supernatural power and living an exemplary life have had on ‘ulamā’ authority. As a different approach to the question of combining knowledge to achieve influence among the people, some academics have emphasized two strains in Sufism, one of which is focused on ethical behavior. According to this ethical strain, the Sufi guide, who is often times also an ‘alim and who is perfect in *adab* (mannered behavior, morals) serves as the “moral guide.”[293] This understanding allows for the possibility that categories of authority can be combined in direct relation to how that authority operates. Additionally, depending on the agent, these combinations can enhance a particular vocation, such as preaching.

Yet, in the modern era, because of the proliferation of those claiming religious authority, even the division which allows for the overlap of ‘ulamā’ and Sufi authority is not enough to account for all of the permutations which occur among religious actors. Although the categories Buehler relies on are still important, they are utilized by new

[292] Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, SC, 1998,p. 14.
[293] Ephrat, Daphne, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Sufis and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2008, pp. 98-100.

actors and in new ways, even among the ‘ulamā’. Living a pious life is demonstrated by, and helps one gain, the trust of the people and is associated with outward behavior according to proper morals, based on the Sunna of Muḥammad. Today, ethical and spiritual authority can be attained by anyone who uses his/her life as an example for those whom they admonish, as with the da‘wā movement in Egypt (chapter 4). Transmitted knowledge based on scriptural sources on the other hand, as an area of ‘ulamā’ authority, relates to specialized education and training in the religious sciences. Although this area of authority is to some extent also been open to those with non-religious training, most of the people in Egypt, especially in the urban areas, still rely on the ‘ulamā’ for guidance concerning codes and norms of behavior. Additionally, the ‘ulamā’ are relied on to explain why such codes and norms exist and how they are connected to their divine source, even though to some extent they share even this duty with secularly trained specialists.

The category of the esoteric refers to a spiritual knowledge that God bestows on a select few, hence its relation to authority has not changed as much. The charisma of the one who possesses esoteric comprehension still relates to authenticity and is proof of piety because it is a gift to one who has “purified his/her heart” through exemplary knowledge and behavior. This type of authority is often understood to belong to only those individuals who have established a direct connection to God, whether it is through pious or ascetic behavior, and who, as a result of this closeness to God, receive special insight and visions and can also perform miracles.

Categories of authority work best as models of how they are generally understood to function, since authority relies on the compliance of the people and it is their public vocations that the ‘ulamā’ exercise their influence among believers. However the functions themselves are not always continual, especially in the modern era, which usually means that the categories, in order to retain effectiveness, must remain fluid. This is exemplified in the case of Shaykh Sha‘rāwī, who, in the late 20th century was influential as an ‘alim precisely because he was able to link characteristics associated with various forms of authority. Hence, it is important to see Sha‘rāwī in the context of the main task he performed, and how his authority was adapted to help him accomplish that task. Thus we do not limit the function of any religious actor according to the type of authority associated with any particular activity, but instead examine how authoritative characteristics become complementary reinforcements when manifested in appropriate ways. Contemporary religious agents often mix the various qualities of authority in ways that belie their pre-modern distinctions, especially according to firmly entrenched notions of how those qualities are matched to particular functions. Sha‘rāwī represented a dynamic mix of the qualities associated with Sunni authority but he remained recognizable by his main vocation as an ‘alim preacher.

➢ Sha‘rāwī and Sufism

Characterizing Sha‘rāwī’s connection to esoteric knowledge, reflects his function as a moral guide, according to the ideas associated with the ethical strain of Sufism.

Although he was influenced by Sufi ideas, his public task did not include being a Sufi leader. Our examination of the charismatic nature of Sha‘rāwī's authority will focus on him as a man whose public purpose was to preach to the people in order to make religion easier for them and bring them back to correct belief and practice, and he used his insight into unseen knowledge primarily for this purpose. He was not teaching Sufism to Sufis, nor to anyone else. His acquisition of esoteric knowledge was important to his function as a religious guide.

It is important not to limit the discussion of charismatic authority or even the sanctity of a godly person, to a discussion of Sufism, especially of *tariqa* Sufism (here I mean belonging to orders as a path and all that that entails). Sufi principles related to esoteric knowledge, its nature and apprehension, are often used in broader contexts that give recognition to their reality but not in direct reference to a particular brand of Sufism or even to Sufism in general. While many studies of Sufi saints, those attached to particular orders or notions of sainthood, abound, in this dissertation we will try to understand how concepts of sanctity are realized outside of these official connections and how such realizations manifest in conceptions of piety and authority.

For this purpose it is not necessary to firmly place Sha‘rāwī within the traditions of ṭarīqa Sufism, or even of sainthood in the sense of an affiliated recognition. While I agree with Vincent Cornell that Sufism and sanctity must be seen as symbiotic, this does

not always mean that the holy man has a firm connection to any particular Sufi order.[294] There are many other patterns of behavior and belief that can connect the individual gnostic to Sufism. The gnostic, for example, may be perceived as simultaneously detached from Sufi affiliation and attached to certain concepts of esoteric knowledge. Although these concepts may be related to ideas associated with certain Sufis, they are not always recognized according to how they are embedded in Sufism, which illustrates that these ideas are effective outside of official affiliation.

One such concept is the Sufi idea of knowledge as light. The idea of the illuminating quality of knowledge is common in Islam and, because it is supported in the Qur'an by various verses, is not only associated with Sufism.[295] Yet the Sufis have taken this metaphor further, deriving belief and basing practice upon it. The Sufis also attach light to the esoteric realms of knowledge and then differentiate between illumination and exoteric knowledge, although still claiming that they belong together.[296] Yet this formulation does not preclude its acceptance by the general population, who perhaps are not familiar with the origins of the idea. Many Muslims may believe, for example, that esoteric apprehension constitutes a separate and crucial aspect of true understanding. They may also recognize the embodiment of such a characteristic in individual guides, such as Shaykh Sha'rāwī. I encountered people in Egypt who, while they are not Sufis, believe that God uses the realm of the esoteric to enlighten favored servants such as

[294] Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Ausitin: Univeristy of Texas Press) 1998, pp. Xxxv-xxxviii. Cornell also distinguishes between a popular form of Sufism and the theoretical side.
[295] For example see verses 24:50, 57:28, 3:19-20, 66:8, 24:35.
[296] Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 157-164.

Sha'rāwī, and that such special illumination is a mark of the suitable religious guide. Yet, many of these same people insisted that Sha'rāwī was not a Sufi.

Additionally, sainthood can be studied as a social phenomenon, one in which the saint is seen as concerned with the visible world and not just with the rituals associated with Sufi affiliation.[297] In a similar manner it is recognized that sainthood in Islam includes a range of individuals. What they have in common is merely that they are considered to possess special spiritual gifts bestowed on them from God. Saints can be both inside and outside of Sufi organizations, as well as those who, through their pious acts and knowledge, receive gifts without practicing or acknowledging that they travel the Sufi path in any form.[298]

Sha'rāwī never taught mystical principles as such, as it would have been inappropriate to his role as alim-preacher and unnecessary to his task. Instead he used his esoteric formulations to clarify the Qur'an for the people. Moreover, his ability to interpret according to his knowledge and experience of the unseen was accepted by the people, as is witnessed in the stories that are told concerning his special gifts. In the same way Sha'rāwī's exegesis, when it did utilize Sufi themes or methods, was connected either to his accepted ability to receive special hidden knowledge from God or to his exposition on how these insights could be utilized by his audience to further their understandings of faith. So although he spoke about the hidden meanings in the Qur'an,

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[297] Omid Safi, "Bargaining with *Baraka:*Persian Sufism, Mysticism, and Pre-modern Politics", Omid Safi The Muslim World, Volume 90, Issue 3-4 (p 259-288) p. 260-265.

[298] See John Renard, *Friends of God: Images of Piety, Commitment and Servanthood*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 140-142.

he never introduced people to those hidden meanings.

Viewing Sha‘rāwī’s mystical connections as removed from Sufi rituals is consistent with the way Sufism has changed in the modern period. Specifically, we need to view him in the context of modern reform-minded Sufism. In recent years, asValerie Hoffman shows, Sufism has became connected to the “intellectual.” In addition, Sufi leaders came to be known for “giving advice” moving away from their connections to the realm of the miraculous.[299] The word Sufism is itself also defined differently in Egypt today. According to Hoffman the definition of Sufism as the purification of the soul has become very common.[300] Again this reflects a move towards neutralizing the meaning, making it more palatable to those who would criticize it because criticism has become so common.[301]

Although these elements have recently come to the forefront of Sufism we cannot portray the idea of the purification of the soul, or even the importance of exoteric religious guidance among Sufis as completely novel. As we have seen, the strain of ethical Sufism, which highlights the connection between esoteric and exoteric and seeks to offer guidance concerning proper behavior, has been present in Islam for quite a while. Sha‘rāwī’s connection to Sufism was portrayed to me by his disciples and family according to ideas which fit both this strain of ethical Sufism and modern Sufi reform. I

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[299] Valerie Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*, Chapter 9.
[300] Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics and Saints in Modern Egypt*. Hoffman says that she received this answer frequently from Shaykhs when she asked them “What is Sufism?” (Chapter 1)
[301] It remains unclear how much Sufism itself has actually changed in Egypt. Hoffmann is successful in proving that it is still an important religious force, but because of the need to put forth an official view of Sufism the new focus of what it means to be affiliated with Sufism could be merely a reflection of how it is presented as opposed to how it is practiced.

repeatedly asked Sha'rāwī's son and disciples about his connection to Sufism, was he a member of, or affiliated with, any particular order? Did he practice according to any particular Sufi ritual? I always received the same answer, no matter how differently I tried to pose the question: he was a Sufi according to the definition of Sufism as the purification of the heart and according to the final verses of Sura al-Furqān in the Qur'an. I was also told that he did visit the tombs of saints, but did not worship there.[302] Sha'rāwī's connection to Sufism relates to the qualities associated with someone, who while associated with Sufi orders, is known more for connection to the esoteric in how this connection was displayed both through his knowledge and in miraculous events in his life. His spiritual gifts and his special knowledge were related to his piety, which was expressed to me as "the purification of his heart." The esoteric then, far from being a category on its own is inextricably linked to piety through knowledge.

➢ **Divine Gifts: *karāmāt*[303]**

It is significant that Sha'rāwī never referred to himself as a Sufi or even as one

[302] Interviews Zamalek, June and July 2009. Lecture of Shaykh ''Abd Al-Ra'ūf Cairo, June 2009.
[303] I will use the term karāmāt in the following way: "In the technical vocabulary of the religious sciences, karāma (pl. karāmāt)...assumes the sense of "charisma", the favour bestowed by God completely, freely and in superabundance. More precisely, the word comes to denote the "marvels" wrought by the "friends of God", awliyā_ (sing. walī), which God grants to them to bring about. These marvels most usually consist of miraculous happenings in the corporeal world, or else of predictions of the future, or else of interpretation of the secrets of hearts, etc." Gardet, L. "Karāma." Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. Edited by: P. Bearman , Th. Bianquis , C.E. Bosworth , E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2009. Brill Online.,May 2009, http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam.com. According to Gardet both the Asharites and the Sufis carefully distinguished between the type of miracles associated with saints and those miracles associated with Prophets (*muajizāt*). Both also agreed that saints should not talk about their karāmāt and that it is bestowed on them by God because of their pious deeds. Karāmāt can range from the power to heal, to predicting future events, to performing miracles. Thus I will use karāmāt to mean divine gifts, or a mark of honor or prestige, or even as saintly miracle. This will help with the perspective that it was because of his pious nature that Sha'rāwī was favored.

whom God had favored with insight into the realms of the unseen. This was for his disciples and followers to do. It is actually a sign of the saints that they do not speak of themselves in this way. His designation as a holy man (*walī*) came from his followers, which gives us a clearer picture of how this authority was derived. It also clarifies how his charismatic authority allowed him to use his assumed knowledge of the hidden for the purposes of his preaching. In a sense the designation of his saintly qualities, because they came from the people, signified the acceptance of his charisma, which in turn verified that he possessed this authority among them. While I was in Cairo I saw Sha‘rāwī's picture everywhere, not just hanging outside of stores but also in more personal places, like small kiosks. Many kept his picture close by because they believed that it represented his presence and would therefore bestow a type of *baraka* (a saint's blessing) on them. Such has been the extent of the attachment Sha‘rāwī's followers feel for him. But at the same time this indicates something new and, like the celebration held at his grave on the date of his death every year, not something he would have approved of during his lifetime. What makes it interesting is what the people who feel a devotion to him have made of his life, the significance they have given him as a result of their understanding of him as a holy person, one who was close to God.

As explored in chapter 2, when looking at the life of a man who is considered saintly, it is important not to present that life as a conglomeration of facts, or to try to distinguish facts from fiction. Instead we must try to understand why stories about the holy man are repeated during and after his life. For many academics who study about

saints, what is important about hagiographic accounts is not whether or not they are true but who retells them and why. According to one academic the stories of saintly persons and the mythical occurrences surrounding their lives, "contain a special relevance for those who re-tell the myth. Furthermore, these myths shape the contemporary response of the hagiography community." This is what connects the saint to the community in which she/he resided.[304] In addition certain stories are repeated as a kind of discourse between the one repeating the stories who is "bestowing legitimacy" and the saint because "the charisma of the saint is remembered, perpetuated, and transmitted through the very recollection of these narratives."[305] In recounting the stories told to me of Sha'rāwī's special visions and dreams I look at what they mean to those who transmitted them and how they place Sha'rāwī in the context of his community.

To this end, it is important to examine the stories about Sha'rāwī's divine gifts with certain questions in mind. What is the social relevance of these stories? _According to his disciples Sha'rāwī did not speak often about the miraculous occurrences in his life, in the same way his family and disciples only spoke about it when pressed. But when I was in Egypt in 2008 there was a series running on television in which his son and some of his disciples spoke about Sha'rāwī's life. In the course of this show they recounted certain stories about the esoteric gifts he received that had not been known about him up until that time. It is an important fact that these stories were being told publicly for the

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[304] Safi "Bargaining with *Baraka:*Persian Sufism, Mysticism, and Pre-modern Politics", Omid Safi The Muslim World, Volume 90, Issue 3-4 (p 259-288) p. 267

[305] Safi "*Bargaining with Baraka: Persian Sufism, Mysticism, and Pre-modern Politics",* Omid Safi The Muslim World, Volume 90, Issue 3-4 (p 259-288) p. 278

first time. Having visited Cairo every summer from 2005-2008 I noticed that while Sha‘rāwī’s presence was still felt everywhere a new type of preacher was becoming influential among the Egyptians. Most of these preachers are not Egyptian, they come to the public through satellite television and articulate a much stricter version of Islam, which is more typical outside of Egypt. In addition these preachers rely on a completely different type of authority, one made possible by many of the modern influences that we examined in the last chapter. Their messages usually focus on behavioral norms extracted directly from the revelation, in a sense transforming the notion of authority gained from transmitted knowledge into knowledge derived directly from the texts hence disregarding the historical importance of intermediaries. While I don’t have time to explore here exactly what these preachers represent, the show about Sha‘rāwī which aired for many nights in the summer of 2008, and was put together by his disciples, was meant to solidify Sha‘rāwī’s legacy in contrast to the harsher, less spiritually centered messages of these newer preachers. By including stories about the divine gifts Sha‘rāwī received his followers were able to distinguish him from other preachers by demonstrating that he had more than just knowledge of books, he was also a friend of God.

I was also able to directly gather stories from people about some of Sha‘rāwī’s extraordinary powers. It was in speaking with friends in Cairo that I was encouraged to ask of Sha‘rāwī’s spiritual gifts. Invariably they associated Sha‘rāwī’s miracles with his elevated worship and behavior, which meant to them that he was living the example set forth by Muḥammad and that he was steeped in Islamic wisdom. The stories I was told of

Sha‘rāwī’s miracles can be divided into particular categories, ones usual in Islamic hagiographic literature. I will discuss three here. First, visions of angels and Prophets who often offer advice or solace, second dreams of dead saints and especially of Muḥammad, and third the ability to heal.[306]

When I visited the Sha‘rāwī Center in his home village of Daqadous, I spoke to the director of the center Engineer ‘Abd Al-Raḥman. When I asked about the miracles associated with Sha‘rāwī he was at first reluctant to talk about it, saying that Sha‘rāwī did not talk about these things because it was a very personal matter and was not well known. He told me that when Sha‘rāwī saw something he kept it to himself. As an example he shared with me a something that happened while he was at Sha‘rāwī’s house. While he and Sha‘rāwī were sitting together, Sha‘rāwī said that he saw paradise and all of the small angels of paradise. As he started to explain this to Engineer ‘Abd al-Raḥman someone came into the room and interrupted. Every time after that, when Engineer ‘Abd al-Raḥman asked him to explain this vision of paradise Shaykh Sha‘rāwī would forget. Finally Sha‘rāwī said that he was not meant to tell Engineer ‘Abd al-Raḥman about this vision but to keep it to himself. In refusing to tell about his vision Sha‘rāwī was exemplifying two important qualities related to proper behavior, *adab*. First of all, on a mundane level, he was acting humble about his vision. In addition by making a point of not telling he clarified that these visions were meant for him as a friend of God and so

[306] All of the following stories were gathered from interviews I conducted with Engineer ‘Abd al-Raḥman at the Sha‘rāwi Center in Daqadous in June of 2008 and ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al- Sha‘rāwi at the Sha‘rāwi Center in Cairo, in June of 2008. The last story was told at a lecture given by ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf in Cairo, Egypt in July, 2008.

were not to be shared. Engineer ‘Abd al-Raḥman, in telling me this story, was emphasizing this behavior more than the fact that Sha‘rāwī had seen, in the course of an average day, something miraculous. He did not feel the need to explain to me how these visions came about, what they could mean or even why Sha‘rāwī would have them. Instead his concern, and reason for telling the story, was to emphasize that the one who receives such miraculous visions behaves humbly as would be expected. In a sense this also demonstrated his complete acceptance of Sha‘rāwī's saintly nature as he did not see the need to defend his belief in the possibility of such occurrences, even to a foreigner.

I was told of Sha‘rāwī's other visions, those he related to his closest associates, such as the time that Sha‘rāwī was in the hospital because of a serious illness and after the doctors left the room, he said he had seen the forms of the prophets appear to him in the order they had come with revelation (i.e. Adam, Abraham, Ishmael….). This story illustrates how in times of trouble God comforts his servants. In this case Sha‘rāwī's comfort came in the form of a vision of the prophets. It is again an interesting story to retell because it demonstrates that God was with him in his time of need, showing both weakness and strength. But also according to the story, and to how Sha‘rāwī understood the unseen, God gave Sha‘rāwī insight into the esoteric in an unsanctified place. It was not about any particular ritual performance so it demonstrated his closeness to God at all time as he carried this sanctity with him into various spaces.

Another story I was told was about Sha‘rāwī's ability to heal the sick. According to the story, once when Sha‘rāwī was traveling and had just disembarked form his plane a

man who worked at the airport approached Sha‘rāwī. He told Sha‘rāwī that he knew who he was, and he asked if Sha‘rāwī could help him with a serious problem he had. Sha‘rāwī took him to dinner at which time he told Sha‘rāwī that he could not sleep and that he had not slept in a very long time. He had been to many doctors but no one could help him. When the man was finished explaining Sha‘rāwī wrapped his arms around the troubled man whispered some verses of Qur’an in his ear and then breathed out on the side of his ear. The man then went home and slept for three days. This was not a story Sha‘rāwī shared with his intimate friends, instead some of Sha‘rāwī’s disciples, including Engineer ‘Abd al Raḥman who told me the story, met this man in Daqadous when he came to plant palm trees at the grave of Sha‘rāwī. This story again illustrates the proper *adab* of a saintly person: the willingness of the Sha‘rāwī to listen to a common man, share a dinner with him and then heal him. In addition the fact that he did not tell anyone leaves open the possibility that there were many such occurrences in Sha‘rāwī’s life that he did not share with anyone. The healing itself is interesting as well, it was not the power of the man but the power of the Qur’an intermediated by the man that healed the sick man. This story demonstrates Sha‘rāwī’s power as an intermediary in a way that, while it involved the Qur’an, is typically associated with the Sufi saint because it is an example of intervention between the seeker and God.

The last story I want to explore was told during a lecture given by Shaykh ‘Abd Al-Ra’ūf after Thursday evening prayers in an apartment across the street from the Ḥusaynī Mosque in Cairo. During the lecture Shaykh ‘Abd Al Ra’ūf said that many

'ulamā' before Shaykh Sha'rāwī's time were in agreement that human beings can know that the throne of God remains stable but can not know how and can not ask how because they considered such a question as *bid'a* (heresy, innovation). Sha'rāwī, on the other hand said that not only is it known that the throne of God remains stable but it is also known how and that asking is not an innovation. How do we know how the throne of God remains stable? Because, according to Sha'rāwī, any king who has the power to master all things can stabilize all things. Therefore God has subdued the throne because its stability is commanded and thus it has been subordinated to the command. What is most interesting about this story is how Sha'rāwī came to this logical formulation, which serves as one example of his capacity as a renewer. He formulated a new understanding concerning a tenet of creed. It was one that had been discussed by the scholars of the past and on which they had come to what they understood was a final, if incomplete, conclusion. Yet he did not receive this renewed understanding through Quranic interpretation instead he received it through his dreams. 'Abd Al-Ra'ūf told his audience that night that Shaykh Sha'rāwī had dreamt of someone who asked the Prophet Muḥammad, "What is your God doing right now? If everything that is written is enclosed [can not be changed] (*ḥāfa al-āqlām*)?" According to 'Abd Al Ra'ūf this demonstrated to Sha'rāwī that God creates things beforehand and only later makes them known to people. "God makes some people high and others low, he is in control. He constricts and releases."[307]

[307]''Abd Al-Ra'ūf, Lecture, Cairo, July 2008.

ʻAbd Al Ra'ūf's story of the dream does not make clarify exactly how Shaʻrāwī received the knowledge concerning the stability of God's throne (perhaps Shaʻrāwī did not make it clear to him). At first even the connection between the interpretation he said Shaʻrāwī made and the knowledge he gained from the dream do not seem connected. Yet, if one considers the point of the story the connection is clarified. The story was told to explain how Shaʻrāwī could uphold God's absolute ability and eternal nature and at the same time believe that humans can constantly gain new understandings of God's truth. This was demonstrated when the person in the dream asked Muḥammad how, even though God has decided everything (which also reinforces the idea that God's throne remains stable because it is subordinated to God's eternal command) God is still active ("What is he doing now?").

As we saw in the last chapter, Shaʻrāwī believed that God knows everything and occasionally brings forth knowledge from the hidden to the known realms. In a similar manner knowledge of the esoteric which comes through dreams, while it still cannot be learned directly by one's own efforts, is received as a type of "unveiling" of the heart. According to al-Ghazālī the secrets of God are like a mirror and the human heart is also like a mirror, one capable of reflecting the light of those secrets. During waking hours most human beings veil the mirror of their hearts with their desires, which prevent them from knowing those secrets while they are awake. In dreams however the veil blows back and forth as if a wind has gone by and so flashes of the unveiling of the secrets can occur. Hence dreams are connected to prophecy (when they unveil the secrets), but not

to ones deeds, except in the sense that only the dreams of the righteous can be trusted. Righteousness though is more than the display of good deeds, it refers to an inner state of piety since as the Qur'an says: "God only accepts good works from the pious" (Qur'an 5:27).[308] In order to trust the veracity of ones dreams when they unveil God's secrets the dreamer must be righteous externally and internally.

Furthermore, dreams of Muḥammad are always considered true according to the ḥadīth in which Muḥammad states that anyone who sees him during sleep has seen the truth because the devil can not take his form.[309] So while dreams themselves do not signify that Sha'rāwī had received a type of knowledge that is unavailable to others, in this story God allowed Sha'rāwī to know about how the throne is stable, clarifying a point of past doctrinal dispute through an unveiling in his dream. The dream was also verified by both Sha'rāwī's righteousness and the presence of Muḥammad. This illustrated to 'Abd Al-Ra'ūf that Sha'rāwī was "higher" than other 'ulamā' because God had given him this essential insight and proof of its veracity.

This story also illustrates Sha'rāwī's method of renewal through different means than those we have already discussed. Here Sha'rāwī was granted a more ordinary type of insight, but nonetheless through an unveiling of the secrets. What makes it even more significant is that he renewed a past understanding not through his interpretation of

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[308] Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *The Rememberence of Death and the Afterlife: Kitāb al-dhikr al-mawt wa-mā ba'dahu*, Book XL of *The Revival of the Religious Sciences, Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn,* translated with an introduction and notes by T.J. Winter (Cambridge: The Islamic texts Society, 1989) pp. 149-154.

[309] Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *The Rememberence of Death and the Afterlife*, p. 156, this ḥadīth is recorded in the book of Bukhārī (see footnote 20).

revelation but through such an unveiling, one that was assumed accurate because Sha‘rāwī referred to the presence of Muḥammad in his dream. This story, and all of the stories about Sha‘rāwī’s connection to the esoteric, serve to bestow legitimacy on him as a holy man. According to how saintly authority is defined, the one who has esoteric knowledge has to be intimate with God. Even Sha‘rāwī’s dream, because of the nature of what was revealed to him, signifies his attainment of a special kind of knowledge.

The Esoteric Dimensions of Knowledge

In the last chapter we examined the role that the ‘ulamā’ play in the overall formulation and dissemination of religious knowledge concerning the seen world, but what about the realms of the unseen? What relation did an ‘alim like Sha‘rāwī have to these realms? And how and why did he utilize them in his preaching? As we saw with the stories of Sha‘rāwī’s karāmāt the fact that his disciples believed that God granted him visions of the unseen provided a kind of legitimacy of his authority in that his intimacy with God was perceived as a gift for his piety as well as for his advanced levels of knowledge. At the same time the stories illustrate that this gift was not usually directly shared with others, instead being reserved for Sha‘rāwī alone. But he also used esoteric knowledge in his preaching when it was necessary to clarify points of faith. As we saw with the example of Sha‘rāwī’s opinion about the throne of God, ‘Abd Al Ra’ūf was reinforcing the idea that Sha‘rāwī used his knowledge of the unseen to formulate lessons for his public because those lessons were needed. What we see in Sha‘rāwī’s exposition

of the unseen realms is exactly the paradigm this story lays out: because apprehension of the unseen was given to the Sha'rāwī only, whatever esoteric knowledge he gained that was meant to be shared with the people then became part of disclosed knowledge and was no longer part of the unseen. In these times he would reformulate what he received to make it appropriate and understandable. But in order to understand how he did so successfully it is also important to examine what he believed about the unseen.

His distinction between the two realms-the seen and the unseen- is based on the idea that God's knowledge and control encompass all of human existence but that human beings are allowed limited freedom according to how God has separated these realms and delegated human involvement within them. Everything for Sha'rāwī rested on the difference between the limitations of human knowledge and the infinite knowledge of God and therefore on the distinction between what humanity can know and enact and that which remains hidden and beyond human capabilities. Therefore for Sha'rāwī human participation was considered both limited and necessary.

Sha'rāwī did not characterize human knowledge as ontologically flawed, he wouldn't because for him the limits of human knowledge are part of the way God created the system of knowledge. Instead Sha'rāwī offered a contrast between God's dominion and human capabilities, because he wanted to emphasize that human beings are limited, thereby focusing on God as the only eternally correct source of knowledge. For Sha'rāwī God's knowledge, because he considered it infinite and always correct, can not be flawed or in need of updating. Therefore he believed that divine laws are eternally applicable

but that human understanding, even though it is flawed, is needed to discern those laws. This is the basic formulation of the difference between the disclosed and the unseen, although humans have limited capacity in both realms and God has total knowledge of both, the two realms are interrelated when they are manifested in human reality.[310]

Martin Wittingham, writing on al-Ghazālī says that al-Ghazālī distinguished between the two worlds of the seen and the unseen. According to Wittingham, in claiming that the world has two aspects the apparent and the spiritual, which only "those with discernment can detect," he related "an epistemological framework to cosmological theories," although he was not the first to do so. In addition as a part of this epistemic cosmology al-Ghazālī said that the physical and spiritual worlds were linked because the physical is a part of the spiritual and does not contradict it. " 'Everything in the firmer world is only a form (*mithal*) of something in the spiritual in the unseen world…in respect to its spirit and meaning…"[311] Al-Ghazālī, related this bipartite notion to Quranic meanings, the inner and the apparent, which are complimentary and never contradictory.[312] Al-Ghazālī's hermeneutic of the Qur'an, which he called striking similtudes (*ḍarb al-mithāl*), was based on this distinction. This method called for finding similarities in the exoteric and esoteric meanings of the verses of the Qur'an, as they

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[310] *Al-ghayb*, pp. 5-6

[311] Wittingham, 2007, *Al- Ghazālī and the Qur'an*, Chapter 3, esp. pp. 36-40. Also see Kristin Sands, 2006, p. 37-40. For Sands al- Ghazālī's method of Quranic interpretation is to show the correspondence between what appears in this world and its counterpart in the world of the unseen. Both authors tell us that al-Ghazālī believed that everything in the one world corresponded to something in the other and vice versa.

[312] Martin Wittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qur'an*, pp. 38-39. Also see Kristen Sands *Sufī Commentaries*, pp. 37-39.

relate to the physical and spiritual aspects of the world.[313] Thus Al-Ghazālī kept the connection between the two and allowed for rational interpretations. In the same way we can view Sha'rāwī's hermeneutic as grounded in the visible realm.

Al-Ghazālī's exposition roughly corresponds to Sha'rāwī's realms but al-Ghazālī goes further into linguistic and cosmological detail. As we saw in the last chapter Sha'rāwi also said that all things in the visible world correspond to something in the hidden world and that when God creates he says be and "brings forth" something which already exists from the unseen to the seen. He also stated that every unseen thing is given "a perceptible image" in the Qur'an. Sha'rāwī, however, did not go into detail about the hidden realms, this would have been too complicated for the general public, and instead like all of his subjects, he used this understanding heuristically. He shared only what was necessary to establish his belief that God controls knowledge, while at the same time demonstrating his own ability to know such things.

This distinction is significant because it demonstrates how uses of different types of authority become effective through the implicit trust the people place in the agent. The one area that defines the actor, in this case Sha'rāwī's ability to interpret the Qur'an, can then be extended to other areas once trust is established. Here Sha'rāwī extended his authority from speaking about the disclosed realms of the Qur'an to speaking about the hidden when he claimed that the Qur'an contains a perceptible image of all unseen things. This extension is exemplified in the way he demonstrated his esoteric knowledge

[313] Kristen Sands, *Sufī Commentaries*, p. 38.

through his expositions about knowledge, it would in this sense have been inappropriate for him, as a moral guide, to try to explain areas of mystical philosophy beyond that. That is also why, according to the paradigm above, even though it was accepted by his followers that he had the knowledge of the select, they also understood that he only distributed what was necessary to guide the general public.

To elucidate these purposes Shaʻrāwī explained that the unseen is comprised of an "absolute unseen" (*ghayb muṭlaq*) and a "relative unseen" (*ghayb nisbī*). The example he gave of human comprehension of the absolute unseen is when the prophets were able to predict future events because these events were revealed to them by God. God must reveal the "absolute unseen" but this does not mean that God has brought the information forth from the unseen to the world of dominion, it only means that perception has been given to a select few. Shaʻrāwī gave the example of when God revealed future events to Muḥammad to verify his mission but also ordered him to say that he did not have knowledge of the unseen. Shaʻrāwī believed that God must reveal this knowledge and that it did not belong to Muḥammad, he was granted apprehension of it but it remained with God. At the same time Shaʻrāwī stressed that Muḥammad shared aspects of this knowledge as was necessary to his mission.[314] In this example Shaʻrāwī gave us a glimpse of how he conceived of his own mission although he never directly claimed

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[314] Muḥammad Mitwallī Shaʻrāwī, *Al-Ghayb*, p. 12

perception of the unseen.[315] Just as Muḥammad shared future events with his community in order to prove the authenticity of his prophethood in a way that was appropriate to him as a prophet, so Sha‘rāwī believed he was sharing his special insights for a particular purpose, to bring forth knowledge that was appropriate to his community in his time.

Sha‘rāwī's second category was that of the "relative unseen" which is comprised of information that has already been brought forth and so does not need God's direct intervention to be known. Because it can be acquired without the help of God Sha‘rāwī said that this type of knowledge is not really unseen, relative here being a perception. Because something is unknown to me does not mean it has not been brought forth by God. In addition for Sha‘rāwī the relative unseen has already come forth to perform a task it has a purpose and therefore has a beginning and an end. The example he gave was how God introduces scientific theories, which are "discovered" by human beings through "coincidence" because it is God who has brought them forth thereby making sure the discovery happened.[316] Sha‘rāwī also said that there are events or information which we may believe are absolutely unseen but in reality they are only relatively unseen. This is exactly how those who deceive are able to do so much damage. They may claim to know what is unseen but in reality what they know is only relatively unseen. Sha‘rāwī called

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[315] I don't mean to imply in any way that Sha‘rāwī was claiming any prophetic characteristics. Instead, as we will see below in the discussion of Moses and Khidr, Sha‘rāwī believed that those who are not prophets can also be granted perception of the unseen before they are brought forth with God's command to "be",

[316] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha‘rāwī,*Al--Ghayb*, pp. 12-14

these people charlatans and asserted that they can never know what God has kept hidden because only God allows entrance into the realms of the unseen. [317]

With his explanation of the relative and absolute unseen, Sha‘rāwī was attempting to affirm the absolute omnipotence of God while allowing that there are dominions which, while they belong to God, are available to certain chosen human beings. Here we see how Sha‘rāwī clearly affirmed the value of receiving guidance from the one who is a righteous servant and so granted esoteric knowledge. This affirmation is related to the one he made for the ‘ulamā’ in general when he connected all ways of knowing to God. At the same time by designating rational knowledge as dependent on both exoteric and esoteric religious knowledge, he made a stronger case against relying on scientists and impostors for true understanding.[318] Those who have purified their souls by becoming righteous servants and who, because of that experience, are granted knowledge from God, are engaged in realizing the truth. Therefore knowledge of the hidden secrets, especially of the secrets of the Qur’an constituted for Sha‘rāwī the highest form of knowledge. Sha‘rāwī’s apprehension of esoteric knowledge was crucial to how his mission was received, which can be understood through the stories of his miracles that are often repeated. In addition his ideas about the hidden aspects of the Qur’an and his explanation of how he gained insight into the Qur’an demonstrated that he understood himself to be bringing forth knowledge from the unseen to the seen realms. The ‘alim

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[317] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha‘rāwī,*Al-Ghayb*, pp. 13-14

[318] For Sha‘rāwī an impostor was anyone who did not know or accept that whatever knowledge they possessed originated with God. He believed that as a result of this fundamental misunderstanding such people possessed an inferior type of knowledge.

preacher, who is also connected to the esoteric, has the authority to meld the hidden to the disclosed, because he is given the esoteric knowledge that it is now required in the exoteric realm.

➢ Sha‘rāwī as Qur’an Interpreter and ‘Alim-Preacher

Many aspects of Sha‘rāwī’s ideas about the Qur’an and Quranic interpretation correspond to Sufi ideas on the same subjects. Some of the premises of Sufi interpretation are: the Qur’an has many levels of meaning, human beings can uncover these meanings[319] and the process of uncovering them is never ending.[320] In addition for many Sufis interpretation of the Qur’an is an unending process in general, one which is different for each individual interpreter. The explanations of the exegetes are also considered to be "suggestive" and not "declarative" offering possibilities and insights but not final decisions.[321] Sha‘rāwī’s principles of Quranic hermeneutics were similar to Sufi interpretation, especially his theory about the Qur’an’s essence, and his idea that the Qur’an contained many levels. Additionally, how his discernment of the secrets of the Qur’an was described, and how he characterized his Quranic insights made him a living example of an interpreter who utilized the principles of Sufi hermeneutics. Ultimately he demonstrated that without an understanding of the deeper levels of the Qur’an, one that comes from a mystical type of interpretation, knowledge of its meaning is limited.

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[319] Although Sha‘rāwī would insist that this could only happen if God allowed it, hence it was not up to human effort alone.
[320] Kristen Sands, *Sufi Interpretations*, p.4-7
[321] See Kristen Sands, *Sufi Interpretations*, Chapter 1.

We have seen that Sha'rāwī believed that the Qur'an is a never ending source of inspiration, always capable of offering new interpretations and so not limited by past understandings. More specifically Sha'rāwi assumed that because elements of the unseen world are represented in the Qur'an but are only clarified over time, new and different interpretations are constantly needed. He also logically explained why believers must constantly contemplate the Qur'an anew- as he said, if there was to be only one final tafsīr (interpretation) it would have come from Muḥammad, since he was the one who received the revelation.

In speaking to his audience Sha'rāwī explained how new interpretations were clarified. Clarity happened, he said, when the heart and mind contemplate at the shores of a verse of the Qur'an. Because every verse of the Qur'an is more than a river rushing towards the heart and mind to quench the thirst of the believer with clarity and purity and understanding and excellence (*ḥusn*) of faith. In addition Sha'rāwi said that the Qur'an came to gather together all of the secrets of existence *(asrār al-wujūd*) until through the effort of prepared minds (*al-'uqūl al-muhayya')* some of those secrets are brought forth in order for some of the Qur'an's secrets to become known.[322] When necessitated by the movement of life then the gifts of the Qur'an are uncovered for these minds. This is how, according to Sha'rāwī, every generation can quench its thirst from the river of the truth of the Qur'an and benefit from its treasures.[323] We can then say that the people responsible for bringing forth this knowledge serve as intermediaries, receiving hidden knowledge as

[322] *Al-Ṭarīq 'ilā al-Qur'ān*, p. 13.
[323] *Al-Ṭarīq 'ilā al-Qur'ān*, 11-13.

it is uncovered for them and is therefore made ready for them to bring it forth and make it known. Such people can also be considered renewers, because they are helping establish the relevance of the Qur'an through their new interpretations for their time, i.e. as necessitated by the movement of life. Sha'rāwī's theory that renewal occurs through those who bring forth the Qur'an's secrets lies somewhere between his idea of the absolute unseen and the relative unseen. While the secrets renewers divine from the Qur'an may not have been revealed before their time, when the prepared minds bring them forth they are no longer accessing something belonging to the realm of God alone. In the moment that that knowledge was uncovered for them it was also uncovered for all of humanity. But this is not like scientific discovery in which God makes something apparent and then humans discover it by "coincidence." The renewer is actually involved in the unveiling process for the sake of what is needed in any particular era.

This is exactly the way Sha'rāwī's disciples explained his Quranic interpretations to me. We explored in chapter 2 how Sha'rāwī was described as a renewer because his interpretations did not follow any interpretations from the past. He gave new interpretations as they were needed for his time, that of the scientific and technological age. We also have seen actual examples of how his interpretations helped elucidate some of the secrets of existence when it was necessitated by the movements of life, in many cases by scientific theories, especially when these theories needed to be proven false. In addition his interpretations were made by his own effort, as we can see by how he

explained them as not really interpretations but based on his *khawāṭir* (thoughts). This characterization was taken a step further by his disciple ʻAbd Al Raʼūf when he told me:

> "Sharʼawi said that all of his thoughts were about the Qurʼan and were not explanations (*tafāsīr*) of the Qur'an, they were instead wells (from which sprung) grains of clarity (*Ābār ḥabbāt aṣfīyāʼ)*- that came to a Muslim's heart in a bit of the verse."[324]

ʻAbd al-Raʼūf ʻs statement implies that Shaʻrāwī, through his efforts and through God's help, had comprehended some of the secrets of the Qurʼan, which he then shared with his audience as his thoughts.[325]

Shaʻrāwī's Quranic insights, even though they were presented to his audience as his own interpretation, were also described by his disciples through terms that closely connect them to Sufi tafsir. In the introduction to Shaʻrāwī's book *The Way to the Qurʼan (Al-ṭarīq ʻilā al-Qurʼān)* the author, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Sanrāwī, gave us a hint as to how Shaʻrāwī's approach to the Qurʼan including his knowledge of the secrets of the Qurʼan gained through his devotion and moral behavior. He said that Shaʻrāwī's book contains secrets by way of emanation (*asrār bifaīḍ*) and inspiration by way of guidance, *(ʻilhām birushd*). He also says that the book has fragrances of a worshipper (*nafaḥāt ʻābad),* illuminations of the adoring (*ʻishrāqāt sājid*) and openings of a lover (*nafathāt muḥib).* In the next sentence Sanrāwī continued by saying that the book helps

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[324] ʻAbd Al-Raʼūf, Cairo, July 2008.

[325] This is especially evident when we compare Shaʻrāwī's descriptions to Al-Ghazālī's, Al-Ghazālī said that there are "inner" or "hidden" meanings in the Qurʼan, a view he spent much effort defending. For al-Ghazālī all interpretation beyond the senses that are "apprehended by the light of spiritual insights" are interpretations which belong to the unseen world. (Wittingham, 37)

one traveling on the path laid out in God's prescribed method for humanity (*manhaj*). Al- Sanrāwī clearly saw Sha'rāwī as a holy person, centering the mystical elements of his interpretation in the capabilities of Sha'rāwī as a lover of God who received inspirations and secrets. But at the same time Sanrāwī was clarifying the purpose of these metaphysical interpretations, which was to help the believer discover the easy path God has prescribed for humanity.[326] Hence we see how metaphysical understanding is used by an 'alim preacher to aid the common folk in the basics of their religion. Sha'rāwī's insights into the realm of the unseen were not just used for purposes of renewal, many were used simply to clarify points of faith for his audience. While his illuminations were understood to be received by Sha'rāwī as a result of his special relationship to God, their use to help bring correct knowledge to the public was also accepted. This understanding was centered in his abilities to use his insights appropriately not in how these insights appeared in his sermons. In fact this concept helps clarify how Sha'rāwī's areas of authority were melded. He was a holy personage who had received illumination but who also knew the correct path and so used these illuminations for the purposes of teaching the people as an 'alim-preacher.

Sha'rāwī's (and his disciples') exposition about his discernment of the secrets of the Qur'an included seeing it as a special kind of knowledge, one that was meant to be shared with the people because it was useful to them. Since Sha'rāwī saw the Qur'an as a

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[326] Muḥammad al-Sanrāwī, *Al-Ṭarīq 'ilā al-Qur'ān*, introduction p. 5.

living renewer, its verses emanating secrets to be brought forth for every generation, he understood that both its obvious and secret knowledge needed to be employed.

For Sha'rāwī this is exemplified in the symbol of the cave as laid out in Sura al-Kahf (The Cave). The terminology Sha'rāwī deployed explaining the allegory of the cave displays the esoteric aspects of his apprehension of this chapter of the Qur'an. The title of the chapter itself held a deep meaning for Sha'rāwī because it signified something which if contemplated, would reveal that like the cave, there are many things hidden in the Qur'an. In addition for Sha'rāwi reference to the cave is symbolic because it stands for God's concealing (*satara*) of the truth. No knowledge of what is hidden within the cave can be gained unless one enters it. These hidden aspects are "secrets" (al-*asrār*) like those which God has placed in his *āyāt* (signs or verses of the Qur'an). But Sha'rāwi believed that it is not possible to know even a little bit about the cave or to uncover (*iktishāf*) its secrets until arriving at the entrance. Coming into the cave though we come to the true, highest levels of knowledge (*ma'arifat ḥaqīqiyāt*).[327] Hence, we can grasp that many things about the cave (both physically and in the Quranic chapter) that are hidden from us; for example knowledge it contains that about the future that is veiled from us. The stories in the cave are veiled from human understanding and difficult to reach unless one has become acquainted with the higher knowledge.

Sha'rāwī also recognized that esoteric knowledge should be used for a specific purpose. For him that use had to be appropriate to his vocation as a religious leader of the

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[327] Sha'rāwī- *Mu'ajizāt al-Qur'ān*, volume 2, p. 59.

people. As part of his epistemology Sha'rāwī recognized that the role of the 'alim was to bring forth the knowledge, esoteric and exoteric, that was appropriate for his time. As an 'alim he had to have knowledge of God's commands (the already known) in order to receive knowledge of the secrets. As an 'alim preacher he had to guide the people by explicating matters of proper worship and belief but he also used esoteric knowledge to do so. He viewed the two as complimentary but hierarchical.

This hierarchy was exemplified for Sha'rāwī, as it was for many Sufis, in the story of Moses and Khidr (Sha'rāwī calls him the "righteous slave") as it is told in Sura al-Kahf in the Qur'an.[328] In the story Moses accompanies Khidr for a while and Khidr acts in ways which disturb Moses, because they seem wrong to him. For example Khidr kills a young boy while Moses is with him and Moses can not bear it so he questions him about it. Khidr eventually reveals to Moses what he did not know and that was that the boy had sold his soul to the devil, and had been a constant source of problems for his parents, who were true believers. The boy would stop at nothing and would eventually kill both his mother and his father.[329] For Sha'rāwī, as for other Sufi exegetes, Khidr represented the one who was privy to the hidden knowledge and therefore could interpret the inner meanings of events. For them Khidr knew of the truth (*haqīqa*) of God while Moses knew and preached about the law (*sharī'a*). But because God gave Khidr perception of the truth he was able to discern the unseen as it related to God's purposes.

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[328] The whole story is in sura al-Kahf Ayat 60-72. Khidr is not named in the sura.
[329] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī- *Mu'ajizāt al-Qur'ān*, volume 2, pp. 76-77

For the Sufis, as for Sha‘rāwī, this special knowledge was received through unveilings by God and used for a particular purpose.[330]

Sha‘rāwī additionally told his listeners that what God wants them to know is that even though Moses was a messenger of God and therefore the greatest knowledge should come through him, God did not bestow greater wisdom to Moses than on Khidr. Actually Sha‘rāwī said that it is a mark of God's will that he can choose from among his worshippers and bestow greater knowledge than what the prophets possessed upon whomever he wills.[331] In establishing God's power to give knowledge to whom he wills, Sha‘rāwī also took a characteristically Sufi position concerning a saint's knowledge.[332] This is made especially clear when we compare this interpretation to that of many non-Sufi exegetes who claimed that Moses and Khidr had different knowledge, Moses knew some things Khidr did not and Khidr knew some things Moses did not.[333] It is a particularly Sufi view to see knowledge as hierarchical and as a result to say that the saint can know what the Prophet does not.

Sha‘rāwi postulated that this story manifested the difference between the exoteric (*al-ẓāhir*) and the inner truth (*al-ḥaqīqa*), hence he distinguished between two cosmological realms in the Qur'an. All people can see the visible and obvious but only God can reveal the truth. But, again, Sha‘rāwī's was an ‘alim preacher and as such he was aware of what was appropriate to this role. Therefore he tried to connect the daily

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[330] Kristen Sands, *Sufi Interpretation*, pp. 82-83.
[331] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha‘rāwī- *Mu‘ajizāt al-Qur'ān*, volume 2, p. 76.
[332] Kristen Sands, *Sufi Interpretation*, pp. 80-90.
[333] See for example Ibn Kathir's tafsir on Sura al-Kahf, verse 63.

lives of his listeners to the Quranic message, in order to instill in them an attachment to their faith. It was only for this purpose that he spoke of the secrets of the Qur'an: he not only wanted to clarify how certain threats to the faith originated in inferior knowledge, he also wanted to remind his audience how their faith must become manifest in their lives. In explaining the difference between Khidr's and Moses' knowledge Sha'rāwī relied on his understanding of the unseen when he spoke about the discernment of the righteous servant. But in the end he used this knowledge to tell his audience that they should be patient when they do not understand God's purposes.[334]

Even Sha'rāwī's discussion of the veils which hide knowledge from the people were grounded in human reality. He said that there are three veils that hide the esoteric from being witnessed by most people. There is the veil of the past, the veil of the future and the veil of space. Sha'rāwī limited his explications of the veiled realms to what pertained to worldly life.[335] He only talked about the veiling of what once was, or what will become, part of human existence. When spoke of the Qur'an and its secrets he limited it to the three areas that are veiled. For Sha'rāwī the Qur'an came and lifted all of these veils, because it is capable of never ending miracles until the Day of Judgment.[336] He said that the Qur'an contains all of the unseen which will eventually be brought forth by God and then will become present and known knowledge. For him this meant that the Qur'an contains some aspects that will not become known until some future time.

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[334] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī- *Mu'ajizāt al-Qur'ān*, volume 2, pp. 77-78.
[335] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Al-Ghayb*, pp. 19-22.
[336] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Al-Ghayb*, pp. 21-22.

(Although we can assume from what he has said about all physical reality having a hidden counterpart, that this would also pertain to a hidden spiritual reality.)

Sha‘rāwī’s example of the veils pertained directly to his listeners. For him when God states in the Qur’an: “To him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth and all that is between them and what is beneath the soil.”(Ta-ha; 20:6) God is saying that there are treasures beneath the earth. Sha‘rāwī believed that before the modern era no one knew that this was the meaning of the verse. It was only recently that God allowed the true meaning of the verse to come forth, so that human beings could know that there is more wealth beneath the soil then what appears on the surface. Thus, according to Sha‘rāwī, God removed the veil of space in the Qur’an giving in it information that would only come forth later.[337] This example is typical of how Sha‘rāwī utilized ideas about the unseen and related them to the lives of his audience. The purpose was to again focus them on the absolute power of God and on only trusting God. He emphasized that even when rational discoveries seem to be unveiling something hidden only God controls when and how it will come forth. In addition because Sha‘rāwī was assumed to be connected to those unseen realms he had the authority to speak about them.

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[337] Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha‘rāwī, *Al-Ghayb*, p. 11-13

➢ Grounding Charisma in Behavior

Many Sufi authors have connected the "knowledge granted directly from God to the ethics and spiritual practice of the individual seekers of knowledge."[338] In this way the stories about Sha'rāwī also offer us a "paradigm of behavior" not just as the "super natural intervening in daily life,"[339] but also in the connection between saint and behavior, life lived and gifts given. Again we need to go back to the way Sha'rāwī's life has been retold, his reception as a man of pious correct behavior, beyond just the expected duties to his attempt to purify his heart. But Sha'rāwī also melded these two aspects by centering his Sufi leanings in the tradition of the strain of ethical Sufism. In a lecture given on a Thursday night in July of 2008 Shaykh 'Abd Al Ra'ūf told his listeners that he would answer the question of whether Shaykh Sha'rāwī was a Sufi.[340] He said that if we define Sufism by certain principles then indeed Sha'rāwī was a Sufi. To begin with he talked about *sharī'a* which he defined as the science of worshipping God and *haqīqa* as the science of reality, which means witnessing God in our life on earth. The Sufi, according to him, does not just worship God, but must also witnesses God. Secondly he explained Rabi'a al-Adawiyya's (whom he called the first Sufi) saying:[341]

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[338] Kristen Sands, *Sufī Interpretation*, p. 3.
[339] Safi "Bargaining with *Baraka:*Persian Sufism, Mysticism, and Pre-modern Politics", Omid Safi The Muslim World, Volume 90, Issue 3-4 (p 259-288) p. 267
[340] Shaykh 'Abd Al-Ra'ūf also said that the idea of answering this question came to him while he was on the metro coming to the lecture and thinking about having a foreigner (who in this case was me) in his audience. Although I have focused on mystical principles in my dissertation I did not ask him to speak about this topic because before the lecture I was not planning on writing about Sha'rāwī's connection to Sufism.
[341] Sufi mystic said to be the founder of love mysticism in Islam.

> "God I love you and I worship you not out of greediness for heaven or fearing hell. If I am greedy for your heavens don't let me in it and if I am fearing hell then let me in it. I worship you because you deserve to be worshipped."

'Abd Al-Ra'ūf said that this means that Sufis should love God as if the see God, not out of their own desires but because God deserves such a love (*ḥubb allāh ka-allāh*). This, he said, means uncovering ones love until he/she sees God, which is precisely what Sha'rāwī did. Hence, 'Abd Al-Ra'ūf concluded, Sha'rāwi was a Sufi if we understand Sufism this way and if we define Sufism as it has been laid out in the last verses of Sura al-Furqān, which are as follows:

> "For, [true] servants of the Most Gracious are [only] they who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with [words of] peace; and who remember their Sustainer far into the night, prostrating themselves and standing; and who pray: 'O our Sustainer, avert from us the suffering of hell - for, verily, the suffering caused by it is bound to be a torment dire: verily, how evil an abode and a station!' and who, whenever they spend on others, are neither wasteful nor niggardly but [remember that] there is always a just mean between those [two extremes]; and who never invoke any [imaginary] deity side by side with God, and do not take any human beings life - [the life] which God has willed to be sacred - otherwise than in [the pursuit of] justice, and do not commit adultery. And [know that] he who commits aught thereof shall [not only] meet with a full requital [but] shall have his suffering doubled on Resurrection Day: for on that [Day] he shall abide in ignominy. Excepted, however, shall be they who repent and attain to faith and do righteous deeds: for it is they whose [erstwhile] bad deeds God will transform into good ones - seeing that God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace, and seeing that he who repents and [thenceforth] does what is right has truly turned unto God by [this very act of] repentance."
> 25:63-71 (Asad)

These are the criteria, which characterize those who have purified their hearts, or who have become Sufis. These verses are directly focused on the efforts of the believer who through proper worship is granted special favors by God. In interpreting them as the true

definition of Sufism ‘Abd Al-Ra’ūf was placing Sha‘rāwī in the tradition of ethical Sufism, a tradition in which his ascertainment of both exoteric and esoteric knowledge would have made him the best type of moral guide.

The definitions of Sufism that ‘Abd Al-Ra’ūf gave that night are clearly centered in striving towards a more moral life and are therefore can generally be understood as criteria that any individual Muslim could adopt. None of them contain any controversy and all of them adhere to the principles of mainstream reform Sufism. Rabia’s quote exemplifies the centering of this effort in the love of God only for the sake of God. But in all of them we see that human effort comes to fruition when God “dispenses grace.” However those who do not strive to perfect themselves do not receive these gifts.

Believers who practice proper *adab* recieve blessings from God as a reward for applying the sharī‘a to the best of their ability. These gifts can range from knowledge granted about right and wrong to knowledge of the truth (*haqīqa).* In this way the ethical strain of Sufism combines sharī‘a with *haqīqa* . This was also how ‘Abd Al Ra’ūf connected Sha‘rāwī to Sufism. Sha‘rāwī directed himself to expounding on how to live a life according to the law but also on how and why one should purify ones heart to make it ready to receive truth. Sha‘rāwī also served as the example of one who had purified himself and did receive that special knowledge. This goes back to the type of authority Sha‘rāwī had among the people, as a man who lived a pious life, one who was an expert in the realm of ‘ilm and one that had apprehension of esoteric knowledge all of which he used in his interpretation, but not all of which he shared.

➢ Conclusion

One of the most common things I was told about Sha'rāwī was that people could find many levels of meaning in his sermons depending on what they were capable of understanding. This reflects his own view of the levels of knowledge especially as they are found in the Qur'an. It also helps explain why he would embed certain mystical notions in his sermons while calling people back to God's way in a simple and direct manner. But in this we also see how he was able to utilize different aspects of authority according to what was appropriate to his role as an 'alim-preacher. His contact with the hidden realms was wrapped completely in his knowledge and his model life and all of these elements worked together to form Sha'rāwī's authority.

The fact that his followers understood his gifts to be connected to his righteous life allowed him to utilize statements about the unseen and hidden realms of the Qur'an to clarify the revelation for the people which in turn points to the nature of his authority in this realm. But it was not necessary, or even appropriate, for Sha'rāwī to ever directly state that he had perceived the unseen or to God's secrets. This was for his disciples and followers to do, thereby giving us a clear picture of how his authority worked. Through a combination of assumed charismatic quality, understood to be gained as a gift from God, and an expertise in religious knowledge he was trusted as one who received his inspirations and interpretations from the hidden.

Looking at stories of his charisma that were repeated by his followers also helped us better understand how and why his authority was effective. They demonstrate how he was perceived to have been a man of God, one who was favored by God as was witnessed through his miraculous experiences. Such a view clarifies how he was trusted by his followers to be qualified to offer advice, especially through his Quranic interpretations. There were times when Sha‘rāwī used his knowledge of the unseen to offer new Quranic interpretations in order to teach public what they needed to know. What we see in his exposition of the unseen realms is exactly this paradigm: he was understood as a holy man (*walī allāh*) to have been granted apprehension of the unseen, but often times the knowledge he gained was needed for and therefore shared with the people. In these times he would reformulate what he received to make it appropriate and understandable.

Sha‘rāwī's understanding of Quranic interpretation as well as the way his disciples explained his interpretation together demonstrate that he was assumed to have received knowledge that had been unveiled for him. His principles of Quranic hermeneutics were very close to those of the Sufis. But because his purpose in interpreting the Qur'an was to bring the people back to relying on scripture as the primary source of knowledge he did not expand on the secrets. Instead his followers accepted that he used them for the purposes of edification as was appropriate to his time and his task. His disciples described Sha‘rāwī as the *mujaddid* (renewer) of the twentieth century. This is also why his Quranic interpretations differed from Sufi interpretation-

because he was preaching to the general public. In addition his goal was not to give an explanation of the deeper levels of the Qur'an, but to explain it in a way that made it accessible and usable for the people.

As to the question of whether Sha'rāwī was a Sufi we can only judge according to how Sufism has been (re)imagined by Sufi reformers and ethical Sufis as meaning the "purification of the heart." According to this criteria he is considered by his most intimate friends to have been a Sufi, because through proper action, worship and behavior (*adab*) one can become pure. God in turn rewards this effort through different levels of charismatic gifts. Sha'rāwī's charisma is the most obvious manifestation of this. It offered Sha'rāwī a type of credibility which was an authentication of him as a man who was sanctified to preach.

In Sha'rāwī the usual categories associated with religious authority in Islam, spiritual, transmission of knowledge, lineage and exemplary life came together in original ways, as was appropriate to his project, because he was able to combine different realms of authority. Part of this successful combining is no doubt because of changed circumstances concerning religious authority in Egypt. But part is also due to the shift that has taken place within the Sufi orders in Egypt, resulting in a type of reform Sufism removed from its controversial aspects and resembling more main stream notions of Islam. Yet, Sha'rāwī's adaptations for the purposes of his project went further than just in how he reformulated notions of authority. As we will see in the next chapter he utilized certain tools to make sure his message was updated and relevant for the people.

Therefore the last chapter of the dissertation will delve further on how he adapted change to ease the reception of his message.

Chapter Six

Adaptation: Relevance Driven by the Needs of the People

➢ Introduction

In the last two chapters we explored how Sha‘rāwī's epistemology reinforced his ‘ulamā’ authority by reiterating past understandings and by combating threats to both the primacy of God's knowledge and to his own authority as an interpreter of that knowledge. In this chapter we will conclude the dissertation by examining Sha‘rāwī's preaching from the point of view of adaptation instead of reiteration. We will look at how Sha‘rāwī reinforced his relevance through modification by examining his methods and the tools he used for this purpose. Sha‘rāwī's adaptations were driven by what contingent reality demanded, hence he formulated and employed various strategies to reconcile the public's needs and capabilities with the revelation by attempting to make his interpretations pertain to their daily lives. In doing so he demonstrated his belief that religious knowledge must be presented to the people in new ways if it is going to effectively respond to the changed circumstances that occur as a result of historical circumstances. It was for this reason that he formulated his response as a modification of the message based on what his public required.

Furthermore, in order to fully understand the status Sha‘rāwī held among the people of Egypt it is important to consider how his sermons were modified by the context

of his audience's lives. Sha'rāwī understood the necessity of making his lessons relevant and to do so he used some seemingly different means. But all of these means aided the effectiveness of the message because their use signaled that the reception of the people was of primary importance. In this chapter we will examine Sha'rāwī's methods and tools of adaptation, from the most typical to the novel, looking at how each brought with it different levels of change. The first methods of adaptation we will consider are ones that are typical for any preacher as they are easily incorporated into the language of the sermon itself. Next we will consider Sha'rāwī's theory of renewal in practice to see how he extended past understandings by emphasizing certain elements of revelation that were relevant to the times in which he lived. This demonstrated a continuation with the past, but also Sha'rāwī's role as syncretizer of new realities and established truths. Our final examination, that of the incorporation of technology, presents the greatest adjustment of past formations of religious observances because it represents the adaptation of contingencies to help ensure the endurance of religious tradition. Sha'rāwī used television to keep his lessons relevant by incorporating them into daily life, but television, because of how it is received, has had a lasting effect on how religion has been carried forward into the contemporary world.

First we will consider elements of the message itself, what methods did Sha'rāwī employ to make his messages understandable? We will explore these tactics in depth, with a special emphasis on Sha'rāwī's use of metaphor and stories to make difficult subjects understandable to the public through appropriate, if novel, language. Sha'rāwī

included contemporary subjects, scientific and medical understanding, and universal values in his messages as was appropriate to his time. He did so in order to ground recent and common language and stories in revelatory knowledge. By refusing to alienate novel elements, Sha'rāwī attempted to keep their potentially negative effects on the public's perception of theological truths under control. He included secularly derived values in his Quranic interpretations in order to subsume them under what he saw as primary, theological understanding. Thus he attempted to make them and their effects a part of religious discourse into the future, but in a controlled way. He also demonstrated how such a task could be accomplished by an 'alim-preacher.

➢ Methods of Adaptation in the Modern Era

Of all of the classes of 'ulamā' it is the 'alim preacher who is responsible for direct communication with the general believing public, offering them advice and admonition in religious matters. It is also the preachers who are partially defined by how they use their erudition to reach the public. Although in the past this often meant that preachers did not produce lasting additions to the corpus of written texts, with the advent of technological innovation, and other modern transformations, this paradigm has changed. It is the receiving public that has recently come to the forefront and the production of texts now includes, and is often defined by, what grabs hold and influences

them.[342] The changed structure of hierarchies of knowledge has resulted in proliferation in the field of religious specialists. Additionally, the rapid growth of religious materials produced for the public and the increase of outlets for those materials. But proliferation of religious material and of those who claim authority in the religious realm has also resulted in the decreased quality of much of what is produced for religious edification because it is no longer subject to the scrutiny of the ‘ulamā’ class in general.

Hence there is often a stark difference between religious material written with a concern for the authenticity and accuracy of the knowledge presented and that which is produced primarily for mass influence. In contrast, ‘ulamā’ preaching, especially in the contemporary age, is one of the areas where these two are combined, in various degrees depending on the preacher. Preachers like Sha‘rāwī have been able to present revelatory knowledge accorded to inherited standards while concomitantly utilizing novel means, as the people demanded. We have already examined the knowledge driven side of this combination, albeit in the context of circumstances and people. In this chapter will focus primarily on the practicable side by looking at how the people who assimilate the more erudite religious content, which is centered in books and the knowledge of the learned, impel the content and delivery of that erudition when it is formulated for purposes of edification.

[342] This shift coincides with a shift among Islamicists towards looking to the practices of adherents as the locus of religious life, in contradistinction to texts and intellectuals. Although in terms of those who study and write about modern Islam it has most often lead to an increased focus on popular figures outside of the ranks of the ‘ulamā’.

From this perspective considering the interdependent relationship between the daily, embodied practice of adherents and the continual ways religious participation is presented is crucial to grasping the full extent of how the two come together. In addition it clarifies how novel, yet lasting forms of interpretation are presented to, and accepted by, a new generation. But in order to fully understand these inter-workings we will need to examine how adherents affect the content of discourse and sometimes the long term structures of religion, especially in times of instability. It is, however, also important to realize that though adaptation takes place, the stable elements of religious doctrine and practice continue to affect the adherent. The degrees of modification or continuation often depend on the period in which amendment is taking place, if it is a period of immense religious instability adaptation, even by traditionally situated actors, can lead to a reconfiguration past accepted norms. Still for the purposes of this dissertation the focus will remain on how stability continues in the face of structural change.

Again showing the absolute link between discourse and practice, we will focus on how the reinforcement of religious rules and belief systems becomes effective as they are guided not only by the preacher who puts them forth, but also by how they are animated through human choice and decision. Dispositions are embodied and result in a person's capacities for action, yet dispositions are often bordered by religious structures. When those structures breakdown they must be reformulated by agents of tradition in order to bring adherents back under their control. One of the ways the preacher does so successfully is to speak to what influences adherents outside of religious structures,

especially if those influences have played a part in the need for reformulation. He/she must reargue why adherence to established views is necessary in the midst of non-religious choices. ‘Alim preachers, as the representatives of certain lasting formations, have the job of offering the people a way to ground critical moments of adaptation in remaining or newly adapted formations. When they are effective in doing so, they also again exert their influence through discourse.

This is partly due to the fact that religious discourse not only helps define the realm of religiosity but is also subject to alteration, albeit within those structures, according to how adherents practice and believe. An effective preacher has to be sensitive to the perceptions of listeners in order to gauge how to present lasting configurations in a manner that will allow adherents to function within the religious system as change occurs and is manifested in their lives. Therefore successful preachers are often led by the concerns and embodied experiences of adherents; in order to make their messages understandable as well as appropriate they need to reach the people in the modes they are presently accustomed to. This has been especially important in the modern era because, with increased religious agents and messages brought to adherents through various mediums, they now choose which of these often competing discourses they consider authoritative. Thus individual agency is increased through the sense that one can decide independently how to regulate oneself.

➢ Agency and Changes in the Modern Era

Talal Asad has asserted that, "Agency, like sanity is not a desire for the subject to control herself, but to be controlled by the world in certain ways and not others."[343] Moral agency by this model concerns a person's engagement with the world, knowing the world and being known by it, as formed by probability.[344] If we want to consider religious adherents as seriously engaged by authoritative sermons, then we must realize that their agency is, while not completely controlled by that authority, specifically structured by their acceptance of it.[345] Thereby demonstrating that believers can and do control aspects of their involvement with religion within the bounds provided by those structures. This is especially important when considering what happens to the individual when the structures supporting religion (such as state, schooling and family life) are in the process of serious sustained transformation, which has been the case in Egypt since the advent of modernity.

An outcome of this transformation, according to Talal Asad, is that in modernity the individual is "encouraged-in morality as well as in law-to govern himself or herself, as befits the citizen of a secular, liberal society."[346] But this does not mean that modernity introduces a "subjective interiority" to Islam; instead it introduces a new type of subjectivity, one, "appropriate to ethical autonomy and aesthetic self-invention."[347] So

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[343] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, p. 73.
[344] Talal Asad *Formations of the Secular,* p. 73.
[345] See Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, especially chapter 1.
[346] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, p. 226.
[347] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, p. 225.

while according to Asad modernity has necessitated that we make ethical decisions independently, that does not mean that we are no longer influenced by external standards of ethics or that our ethical behavior towards others is decreased. This is especially true in a place like modern Egypt where, as we have seen, although people are encouraged to direct themselves and each other in proper behavior autonomously, this has often meant increased pressure to perform specific religious duties.[348] The way external standards are no longer centered in one place, for example in traditional religious authority, has resulted in the added responsibility for believers to decide for themselves where to find ethical guidance, but this does not remove the need to find that guidance from an external source.

Moreover, for Asad what characterizes the modern concept of ethics is the way the nation state has necessitated a separation of ethics from religion. In the modern nation state ethics is considered a private matter although its enforcement becomes the legal responsibility of the state. Ethics, "in a secular state presupposes a *specific political realm*- representative democracy, citizenship, law and order, civil liberties and so on. For only where there is a public realm personal ethics become constituted as sovereign."[349] But the idea of ethics in Islamic history was not dependent on an internal conscience-one autonomous and self-sufficient- as the idea of modern secular ethics is. Instead: "The *sharī'a* rejects the idea that the moral subject is completely sovereign…they (the 'ulamā')

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[348] Egypt has witnessed the rise of charitable organizations set up to help the poor. This is a direct result of movements like the da'wā movement and their counterparts, who emphasize, as we have seen, personal responsibility according to a specific idea of Islamic norms of behavior.

[349] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, pp. 250-255.

regarded the individual's ability to judge what conduct is right and good (for oneself as well as for others) to be dependent on…embodied relationships."[350] This shift in the way ethics, law and the responsibility of the subject are viewed and therefore enacted has, of course, materialized in religious discourse in various ways.

First, the control of the nation state over the law, as we saw in chapter 4, and the concomitant limitation of 'ulamā' control created a new, unavoidable reality, one that presented Sha'rāwī with three choices: oppose, adapt, or appease. His choice to adapt the new reality to revelatory knowledge instead of getting directly involved with political discourse came not just from necessity but also from the way he envisioned his mission as non-political. Thus he was able to work within the state as it stood, because the state did not pose a threat to his authority. On the contrary, adaptation allowed him to further his goals of renewal through da'wā. Moreover, because members of his audience were members of the Egyptian state, already adapted, or adapting in various ways, to the modern reality, he stood a better chance of reaching his goals if he clarified how to moderate new conditions according to his understanding of religious life. Second, in the pre-modern period ethics was seen as a matter of people's relationships within faith communities according to religious prescriptions. The shift in the modern period to viewing individual responsibility as personal ethics befitting subjects who are governed by the state is very significant. It effects the relationship individuals have to well-established religious practice and institutions as well as to other human beings, as it sets

[350] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular,* p. 248.

different boundaries around the circle of responsibility and redefines communities. In the rest of the chapter we will see how Sha‘rāwi tried to accept this reality while still calling forth a public behavior based on ‘embedded relationships’ according to the religious structure he inherited, one he attempted to modify in order to ensure its continuance into the future.

➢ PART 1: Elements of Relevant Adaptation in the Message

In this section we will focus on the elements of Sha‘rāwī’s expositions that were driven by the requirements of his audience. We will begin by looking at how Sha‘rāwī structured and focused his talks guided by a concern for how the public would acquire the knowledge he was setting forth. For this purpose Sha‘rāwī utilized methods and strategies that incorporated ideas, symbols, concepts and technologies that were not only familiar to the people but, often also recently woven into the fabric of their lives. We have already looked at how Sha‘rāwī responded to secular ideas of truth that contradicted revelation and how he attempted to guard religious knowledge from the threats it posed. In addition he also responded to scientific and medical theories, which needed a religious response because they had been recently integrated into the every day lives of believers. Thus he adapted his teachings according to the contingencies as was necessary, engendering various degrees of alteration. This alteration not only affected areas which, by their very nature as contingencies, demanded adaptation over time, but also the areas of instruction he was responsible for conveying intact. His incorporation of technology,

as we will see, changed the dynamic between the believer and her relationship to religious knowledge and ritual behavior.

We will begin with his alteration of the contingent elements of discourse itself, by examining Sha‘rāwī's use of metaphors, stories and repetition as a kind of timeless adaptation, which although they demonstrate concerns about audience reception, are not new methods for the preacher. We have already looked at his metaphor of the instruction booklet of a washing machine as God's instruction booklet for life, namely the revelation, and his metaphor of train tracks as God's prescribed method. In this chapter we will examine his use of metaphor and story more in depth to highlight how it aided adaptation. Sha‘rāwī used these tactics in a profound attempt to syncertize, adapt or reject modern views according to how he understood Islamic norms as they appeared in the revelation.

The means employed by the preacher, past and present, such as metaphors, stories and the repetition of words and concepts, (re)introduce sometimes difficult elements of faith in ways which enable listeners to amalgamate them with their every day perceptions. By explicating with such methods Sha‘rāwī relativized contingencies in terms of theological understandings which also helped the process of the assimilation of those understandings. Because stories and metaphors offer a means to present a particular detail in the guise of something else, they allow the speaker to present views in images and concepts readily available to listeners. Taking one concept and presenting it in terms of another affects the way we define and therefore conceive of the original concept thereby adapting it according to a particular instance of apprehension.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that when we use metaphors we restructure the linguistic formulations of one term in the sense of a different one (what I will call the first and second factors of the metaphor). But in doing so we are actually affecting the way we talk about, understand and enact the original concept, thereby affecting not only the concept, but also the language and activity surrounding the concept by making them metaphorical. In other words metaphorical concepts become "normal," shaping action in ways we are not even aware of.[351]

Lakoff and Johnson also identify a category of new metaphors those they call "novel metaphors." These are metaphors that have not been widely used before and they derive their force from being insightful and appropriate "given our experiences as members of our generation and our culture."[352] They are also able to make our experiences coherent through "entailments," which are what comprise the novel metaphor and can include literal statements and other novel metaphors. Here are their general propositions about novel metaphors:

> "(1) Metaphors have entailments through which they highlight and make coherent certain aspects of our experience. (2) A given metaphor may be the only way to highlight and organize coherently exactly those aspects of our experiences. (3) Through its entailments, a metaphor may be a guide for future action. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. Metaphors, therefore, can be like self-fulfilling prophecies."

Novel metaphors also have the power to define reality. They do this through a "coherent network of entailments that highlight some features of reality and hide

[351]George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language*, The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 77, No. 8 (Aug., 1980), pp. 453-486.
[352] Lakoff and Johnson, *Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language,* p. 481.

others." The acceptance of the metaphor, then translates into an acceptance of the reality it creates by what it focuses upon and what it ignores and leads us to accept its propositions ("entailments") as true. But this truth, like the reality the metaphor creates, is relative to the metaphor.[353] So while metaphors depend on the culture to animate them and make them understandable, they also must utilize concepts embedded in cultural systems. Metaphors by their nature hide and highlight the elements that fit the goals of the one envisioning and using them. They present a certain version of truth, creating reality made all the more powerful by the fact that their insights are based on the lives of the members of the cultural group they are directed towards.

In Sha'rāwī's novel metaphors he took a religious concept as the first term of the metaphor, placed it in the context of the lived reality of the audience, and then in the second term of the metaphor ignored and highlighted certain aspects. In doing so Sha'rāwī was able to create a reality which reinforced the truths he set out to teach, even engendering certain behaviors. The metaphors and stories of Shaykh Sha'rāwī were also driven by the cultural reality of his time. He re-envisioned religious concepts by using them in new metaphors, offering guidance for the present that he hoped would continue into the future.

Let's start with one of Sha'rāwī's novel metaphors. The example we will look at is taken from one of his sermons in which he talked about the stages of creation, the metaphor is: God's creation of humanity as bread making. In this metaphor Sha'rāwī

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[353] Lakoff and Johnson, *Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language*, p. 484.

brought together two distinctive elements, the first factor of the metaphor is focused on knowledge about creation, and the second factor on action and experience through bread making. Ultimately he created a reality to fit his goal: reinforcing the Quranic view of creation by hiding and highlighting certain aspects associated with the each part of the metaphor. Sha'rāwī began by saying that since no human being witnessed creation,we must rely on what God has said about it; thereby setting out his goal as understanding what God told humanity about creation in the revelation. He continued:

> "When God speaks about the creation of humanity [in the Qur'an] he says one time, 'I created everything from water.' The second time God says, 'I created humanity from earth.' The third time he says, 'I created humanity from clay.' The fourth time he says, 'I created humanity from fetid clay.'[354] The fifth time he says, 'I created humanity from dry fired clay like pottery.'[355] This is the essence of humanity. After that God breathed the spirit into humanity. One might suppose that there is a contradiction in saying one time that human beings are created of water, another time of earth, a third time of clay, a fourth time of fetid clay, and a fifth time of dried clay. However we have emphatically maintained that if one studies these stages together he will find no contradiction in them. It is the same as if I took a loaf of flat bread and said, 'this is [made] from wheat.' I would be telling the truth because [wheat] is [present in] the first stage of bread making. When I say that, 'this flat bread is made from flour,' I am also telling the truth because flour is involved in another one of the stages of making flat bread. If I say yet another time, 'this flat bread is made from dough' I am again being truthful because this is another one of the stages of making flat bread. So we see that even though I said one time that flatbread [comes] from wheat, another time that flatbread [comes] from flour, a third time that it [comes] from dough and a fourth time that it [comes] from leavening, each statement it true. This is because each one is giving name to a stage within the process of bread making. There is no contradiction in the succession of these stages. So when your Lord says, 'I created you from water' this statement is true, just as when your Lord says, 'I created you from earth,' it is also a true statement. Because when water is mixed with the earth it becomes mud. When

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[354] *Ḥama' masnūn* is black fetid clay that has a certain odor. Edward Lane *Arabic-English Lexicon*, volume 1, P. 638

[355] *Ṣilṣāl*, can be synonymous with *ḥama' masnūn* or can mean a clay that can be, or has been, fired to become hard. Edward Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, volume 2, P. 1711.

> God leaves mud until it changes [then it is] like what happens with raw dough in which we put leavening, until it reacts and ferments and becomes fetid black clay. When we leave clay it then becomes something like hard clay from which the sculptor can sculpt what he wants….when the sculpting of the human being is complete then comes the stage of blowing in the spirit, which is when life enters into the human body."[356]

Let's first notice how Sha'rāwī used certain structures, besides the metaphorical one he employed, to facilitate the acquisition of difficult knowledge among the people. First Sha'rāwī's use of repetition was necessary because this was a novel metaphor so the connection between the two terms needed to be restated for the sake of clarity and for easy recollection. It is also noteworthy that he repeated words and combinations of words from the first factor of the metaphor in the second factor, which strengthens the connection between the two and directs the mind towards the similarities repeatedly. This tactic continually highlights specific aspects and directs the listener towards the truth he hoped to underscore and away from what may not have fit with the message he hoped to convey. As the sermon progressed Sha'rāwī repeated the short excerpts from the Qu'ran, which begin with "I created," many times over. By repeating the elements he wished to emphasize, what God says about creation, he accentuated God's words and helped the audience commit them to memory for later use in strengthening their faith. This idea of repetition is common in public preaching and coincides with something that can be seen when one watches Shaykh Sha'rāwī preach. During his sermons he would state a verse from the Qur'an and then, when he repeated it, it would also be repeated by the audience. The second time Sha'rāwī recited the verse he

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[356] *Min Faīḍ al-Raḥman fi Tarbiyyat al-Insān*, pp. 4-6

would stop after the first word, say "hu?" and wait for the congregation to repeat the rest of the verse with him. This facilitated memory not just of the verse, but also of its imbedded interpretation through interactive participation.

Sha'rāwī's use of repetition also helped him build his metaphor in stages. At first it seems that his main goal was to defend the Qur'an against its detractors who say that it contains contradictions. But as the sermon progresses it is clear that his main goal is to explicate creation as a process, the stages of which are built upon each other, in order to defend the Qu'ran against doubt and even scientific knowledge (in this case the theory of evolution) which could potentially undermine faith in its veracity.[357] So he began by setting out what the Qur'an clearly says and then he built, through the use of repetition, his interpretation concerning the stages of creation. First he introduced the original concept, the elements from which we are made. Then with the metaphor Sha'rāwī reiterated that not only are the Quranic statements not contradictory, they stand for a process, which can be understood in terms of another everyday process. He extended the Quranic meaning not just because he reinforced God's words, but in interpreting them with the use of this metaphor, he offered a new conception, which exemplified the feasibility of the proposition as well as presenting its clear connection to daily life.

In addition Sha'rāwī never gave full voice to his opponent. It is obvious that by choosing to formulate his arguments with limited explanation of the opposing viewpoint

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[357] Later in the sermon he goes on to say that those who claim human beings came from "fish and monkeys" are misguided.

(those who say the Qur'an is contradictory), he instead focused the attention of his audience elsewhere. In building up the argument for the truth of the Quranic account before even mentioning the ideas of the doubters, he solidified his view first. After this he mentioned the potential threat, without naming it and without going into detail, i.e. giving the listener just enough information to identify it, thereby reinforcing his view by directing the attention of the listener towards a particular theological truth and away from the challenges to it. This is not to say that he was manipulating or hiding a real agenda. But just to restate that he was reformulating understanding according to, and in defense of, revelatory truth.

But he could not completely ignore the opposing argument if he was going to defend against it, especially because the threat it posed was real. Believing that the Qur'an has contradictions means believing that the Qur'an is imperfect. This idea contradicts a basic tenet of Islamic faith and was therefore something Sha'rāwī had to defend against. But Sha'rāwī reframed the argument in his own terms through a very powerful metaphor. Powerful because it included a physical reality and a cultural symbol that all Egyptians are familiar with-bread making. Bread is called *'aish* in Egyptian dialect which can also mean life (connected through the meaning of sustenance), and by using this as the second factor of his metaphor Sha'rāwī illustrated even further how language, even one simple word, can become the building block of a novel metaphor, making it even more appropriate. In this case since bread is already connected to life it is just one more step to connect it to the beginnings and formation of creation through its

own beginnings and formations. It also infused the every day with the theological again allowing a reformulation of the idea of creation by connecting it to living experience.

In terms of his metaphor being a self fulfilling prophecy, making a new reality as he spoke it, he achieved this through all of the means explored above: repetition, building his argument, focusing on God's words and only minimally referring to the contrary position, and through his use of *'aish*, one deeply entrenched in Egyptian life, to concretize his ideas in the lives of the people. The reality he ultimately tried to create was one in which God's words are true (which he states repeatedly). But this can also translate into action even beyond rejecting counterclaims. If Sha'rāwī convinced a listener, through embedding theological knowledge in the every day, that the Qur'an is the depository of all true knowledge; that listener could potentially extend that principle and apply God's words to other life situations, especially when faced with threatening counterclaims. Helping people govern their behavior in accordance with God's words (or God's prescribed method) has been a typical role for the preacher. But it was a special challenge for Sha'rāwī because the acceptability of opposing views was growing in his society. In addition social and legal norms, which previously had reinforced certain religious behaviors, were also rapidly breaking down in Egypt in the late twentieth century.

So Sha'rāwī was, in some ways, seeking to reinstate values in a typical way for a preacher, but he was also facing new kinds of threats, such as the theory of evolution, which called into question the veracity of the Qur'an. His responses to particular secular

threats to theological understanding in general can be detected in both his metaphors and stories. While both metaphors and stories help listeners understand one, usually difficult, concept in terms of something simpler, they also serve different functions. Novel metaphors, as we have seen, can help create a certain reality while stories can serve the purpose of fortification. Stories also allow for more than one concept to be explored because their references are drawn out and often various. Sha'rāwi basically told two kinds of stories, those he repeated from the Qur'an and hadith and those about the people of Egypt, usually those of his village, both of which he used to relate some truth directly to the lives of the people.

In one example Sha'rāwī began by telling his listeners: "There is dignity in full obedience to God's law. When the decision comes from God (*the Exalted)* then there is no bitterness, no problem and no pain. With this faith it is possible for individual disputes to vanish." Sha'rāwī said that in disputes God prepares a third side which becomes a "screen" (*sitr)* for two disputing parties or individuals in order to protect their dignity. In addition God's efforts to reconcile are placed in the third side, which is necessary in order for the reconciliation to succeed. Sha'rāwī went on to tell the story of a husband and wife who loved each other very much but had become estranged from one another through their disagreements. The woman wanted to know what her husband was doing so she snuck up to his door to listen. "The husband was calling to God saying, 'Oh Lord make my wife come to reconcile with me.' Then he began appealing to God's

saints saying, ' Sayyida Zaynab[358] for you I vow such and such if my wife reconciles with me.'" The wife then returned to her room and put on her finest clothes and headed back towards her husband's room as if someone was pushing her, while saying:

> "'Why are you forcing me into reconciliation with him Sayyida Zaynab?' In this way we see that the excuse associated with (*al-taḥajjuj bi*) Sayyida Zaynab is a screen (*sitr*) for love. The tale, even though it is a funny anecdote, illustrates how each side in a dispute loves it when a third side enters [to reconcile them]. So we see that God wants to preserve for humanity their superiority and their dignity so he put in the heavenly laws that which assures this dignity."[359]

There are a lot of things going on in this story. First we have the original factor, the idea that when God's law is adhered to believers do not suffer, which is repeated at the beginning and end of the story for emphasis. But we see that the second factor is different from the metaphor because it also includes much more than just identifying and reformulating the first factor, it brings forth many cultural and religious symbols extending the comparison and leaving open the possibility of multiple interpretations and applications of both the original lesson and the story. For example we have in the story human relationships, the divine-human relationship, and perhaps most importantly an explanation of the intervention of God, reached through the heavenly law. The idea of

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[358] Granddaughter of Muḥammad and sister of Husayn, Zaynab is a saint greatly venerated by the Egyptians. She is the matron saint of Egypt and her shrine in Cairo is a very popular gathering place, especially for women. See Nadia Abu-Zahra, *The Pure and the Powerful: Studies in Contemporary Muslim Society* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press and Garnet Publishing Ltd., 1997). Abu-Zahra says that Sayidda Zaynab occupies a special significance for Egyptians: "Egyptians think of al-Sayyida Zaynab as the protector (or mother) of the house of the Prophet. She is (also) the mother of Cairo and all of Egypt. For the common person she is the mother of them all. As the most popular female saint in Egypt, Egyptians from all parts of Cairo and the surrounding provinces visit the mosque (which houses her tomb) daily and seek al-Sayidda Zaynab's help." (p. 116)

[359] *Min faīḍ*, pp. 30-34.

divine law is often presented as if God is removed from the individual following the law, reached only in relation to what was given in the past. But here Sha'rāwī paints a completely different picture; that of God intervening through the heavenly law, which in this case is the third side. Sha'rāwī was not just telling his audience that God is living and concerned with their lives but that the heavenly law protects and assures human dignity which comes about when God provides a third side. God's living provisions then are, according to Sha'rāwī, a part of the heavenly laws.

But Sha'rāwī also used the narrative format to leave open what the "third side" actually is. In the story we are not even sure in what way the law is being followed. The only thing that is clear is that the man is asking for God's help through Sayyida Zaynab and that the wife uses the opportunity to end the dispute.[360] So while the man does plead with Sayyida Zaynab, asking her to intervene, the saint does not actually intervene as far as we are led to believe, because the wife walks "as if" Zaynab is there. But the story can be interpreted to support the belief in saintly intervention because Sha'rāwī does not condemn the practice of asking saints for help. Also Sha'rāwī begins by talking about God intervening with a third side which here is connected to the supplication of the husband even though not to an actual intervention by the saint. Sha'rāwī was actually unclear about exactly how God intervenes in such cases. How has God put forth effort to bring about the third side? What is the heavenly law in this case? In the story the saint

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[360] In the story Sha'rāwī does not refer to an actual intervention by the saint. As we discussed in chapter 2 some Sufi practices and beliefs are controversial, for example the belief in the power of dead saints to intervene between the believer and God. Sha'rāwī was very careful in his sermons not to reference these practices directly.

is the screen for God's action (Sha'rāwī even used the word love to describe the third side God provided). But what exactly is the third side in the story? Is it the love God places in the hearts of the husband and wife before they begin to reconcile? Is it the idea of the saint? Or is it the man's pleading with the saint? If it is this last choice it could mean that a saint's intervention is useful to God's purposes, even though only God can grant the petitions of a believer. Sha'rāwī was clear in the story that God grants the petition of the man by putting forth effort, but his opinion of the intervention of the saints is less easy to state.

The narrative form itself allowed Sha'rāwī to present multiple possible interpretations of meaning depending on what the listener took from the story. It permitted Sha'rāwī to bring the story itself to an acceptable conclusion; the couple fight, God intervenes, the couple reconciles. The fact that the story concludes means that the listener is not left with a sense of bewilderment at the inconclusive nature of the other elements surrounding the story. The narrative form also allowed Sha'rāwī to use one of the most popular saints in Egypt (Zaynab) and one of the most common practices among Egyptians (calling on the saints for help) to put forth his lesson that God acts in the lives of believers.

Sha'rāwī's telling of stories, or his repetition of sayings, from Egyptian villages was appropriate to his audience because many were connected to the villages in some way. Even his audience in Cairo would have been comprised of many who originally came to Cairo from the rural areas of Egypt. Such stories also helped the people relate to

his theological principles not only because they could recognize themselves or their families in them, but also because it reminded them that Shaʻrāwī was one of them, a man of the common people who began in humble circumstances. Shaʻrāwī's stories were not only driven by the needs of the people, they also allowed him to expand those principles in ways which offered multiple meanings. Stories that people can relate to, both sociologically and religiously, are ones that present the greatest advantage for expanding principles because they are an easily understood, expansive form which enables the people to choose what to take away from them.

Shaʻrāwī also employed scientific, technological, medical and universalistic themes because this related his words to the lived reality of his late twentieth century audience. But these elements added more than just novel comparisons. Their inclusion also meant incorporating contemporary issues and contemporary language. We have looked at Shaʻrāwī's inclusion of geological and even evolutionary thought in his sermons, whether or not he accepted the information, as appropriate to his theological view and therefore important to his method of adaptation. Although we have not focused on his use of medical knowledge the metaphor about creation and bread making includes his opinion, based on the Qur'an, about when each individual life begins. His son also told me that when Shaʻrāwī wanted to know any medical information he would make an appointment with a doctor and then instead of undergoing an examination he would use the doctor's time to ask questions about different medical procedures so that he could

gather correct information.[361] This story exemplifies how Sha'rāwī attempted to understand modern scientific and medical knowledge in order to include it in his sermons with a formulated response based on the revelation.

In the following example we will focus on how Sha'rāwī highlighted the unity of humanity by engaging his principle of renewal through new interpretations of revelation. In this case we will see a further adaptive measure one which reoriented the public towards the formulation that love should be extended to all of humanity, what I will call love of neighbor. And while this idea was present in Islam in the past, Sha'rāwī built upon it, and emphasized it, in a new way as was appropriate for his time.

As we have seen Sha'rāwī did not advocate for the equality of all religions in the sense that he believed that they all have equal claim to correct and complete revelatory material. He kept to the position that only the Qur'an is complete and unchanged.[362] But he did teach that there is equality at the individual level between all people and that as an extension all believers must love their neighbors, even those who are not Muslim. In this way he looked beyond his own religious community (*umma*) while he advocated for a familiar ethical standard albeit with a new emphasis. Some of this was necessitated by the fact that during Sha'rāwī's lifetime the community was already reformulated in terms of the nation. But at the same time Sha'rāwī adapted the reality of a globalized world to

[361] 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sha'rāwī, interview, Cairo Egypt, July 2008.
[362] Shaykh Abdul al-Ra'ūf also told me that Judaism was too focused on the material to the detriment of the spiritual and that Christianity was too focused on the spiritual to the detriment of the material. By contrast, he said, Islam offers the perfect balance between the two. Interview, Cairo, 2009.

revelation when he extended the love of neighbor to include all of humanity based on his interpretation of certain ḥadīth.

It is also important for us to view his adjustment not just as something influenced by externals. Sha‘rāwī’s attempts to arbitrate between what was happening in the world around him and religious texts, when it did result in a renewed interpretation, fit with his idea about renewal according to the “movements of life,” which we have explored throughout the dissertation. Sha‘rāwī believed that new meanings could be gained from revelation, ones that were hidden before their appropriate time and brought forth by special minds as was necessitated by new life circumstances. He also believed that renewal was built upon what he inherited from the past, even when that meant discovering newly unveiled information. In the following example we will see how ideas of arbitration, adaptation and renewal came together in his thought and decisions in order to integrate the contingent reality.

On the subject of the love of neighbor, Sha‘rāwī began with accepted standards taken from three hadith:

> “Truly God (*al-ḥaqq)*, praised and exalted be he, wants to give the people a scale[363] and that scale is summarized in:
> *‘All Muslim against Muslim [violence] is forbidden’
> *‘The Muslim is the brother of the Muslim’
> *‘Not one of you [will] believe completely until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself’[364]
> The Prophet, peace and blessings upon him, wants to disseminate (*yanshara*) equality (*al-musāwā)* when he affirms this instruction concerning free passage

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[363] The scale for Shaykh Sha‘rāwī was, “that which straightens the movement of life in the universe.”
[364] These are all taken from the ḥadīth and since this quote is directly taken from one of his sermons, Sha‘rāwī did not give specific references for them.

> [between human beings] (*al-'istiṭrāq al-waṣā'i*) through his hadith. Surely the Prophet is about to connect all of the inhabitants of the world in one hadith when he says, 'Gabriel continued recommending that I be with my neighbor until I though my neighbor would become an inheritor' (Noble hadith). When we contemplate this hadith we see the whole world almost becoming one human family. When one neighbor cares for the other, and when a neighbor is concerned with trying not to infringe on the right of another neighbor, we find that the human circle is welded together. We find the whole universe connected in love and order and responsibility and equality, connecting every single believer with the other,[365] connecting whoever loves for his neighbor what he loves for himself. In this free passage [between human beings] (*al-'istiṭrāq*) is the benefit of achieving happiness throughout the universe. The happiness of the universe continues when you work for the happiness of others and others work for your happiness."[366]

Sha'rāwī was stretching the meaning derived form the first three ḥadīth to extend that meaning, with a new interpretation, by using the last ḥadīth he mentions. Let's break this process down and begin with how, in the last ḥadīth he mentions, Sha'rāwī insinuates that love of ones neighbor is a religious necessity, although he stops short of connecting it directly to religious duty. Still it is also important to notice how he seamlessly moved from the equality of all believers (brothers) to the equality of all humanity with the concept of the free passage between human beings, which directly connected the ḥadīth about love of other Muslims to the hadith about love of neighbors. In the hadith about the love of one's neighbor he insisted that first of all, the Prophet established equality and nearly connected all of humanity in the hadith, which serves as

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[365] *Al-Āḥra*-the other, here means other in terms of those inside and outside of Islam. I do not think it makes sense to the whole passage to read it as "to the other (Muslim)" because it is obvious from the next part of the sentence that this other is the neighbor. In keeping with the ḥadīth when he refers to Muslims loving other Muslims he uses the word ('*aḥ)* brother, when referring to the love between people universally he uses the word (*jār*) neighbor.

[366] *Min Faīḍ* p. 205-206

the basis for his position concerning the equality of humanity and by extension his formulation of the love of neighbor.

Furthermore, when he stated that "happiness in the whole universe" is brought about when human beings are allowed to freely care for one another on the basis of equality, he is making a statement very similar to when he said that the beauty and balance of the universe is brought about when believers follow God prescribed method(see chapter 3). Even beyond the similarities of the two ideas we can also assume that Sha'rāwī would not claim that the entire universe could be happy if God's method was not in control. Therefore he is affirming that love of ones neighbor by extension must be part of God's plan for humanity.

Sha'rāwī was extending a religious duty, that of loving other Muslims, to now include love of neighbors, individuals that share their nation, and eventually to the entire world.[367] He was not adding something new, this information had been in the texts all along. Instead he made caring for those outside of the Muslim community, something necessitated by the rise of national identities and globalization, a religious imperative by attaching it to something already understood to be a tenet of faith and by attaching it to the happiness of the universe. By doing so he placed religious borders around an already changed reality; recommending the religiously approved way of acting in the midst of what had essentially already broken free of religious structures. Love of neighbor is in a

[367] In my interviews I was told that Sha'rāwī was the renewer for the scientific, technological and global age. This passage exemplifies the global aspect. We have looked at the scientific, and at the end of the chapter, when we examine his use of television, we will see the technological.

sense how Sha'rāwī demonstrated that religious texts, here the ḥadīth, respond to new reality.[368] But he also went even further when he said that a Muslim must love for her neighbor what she loves for herself in order to create harmony in the universe. We can assume based on his hermeneutic that he viewed this as newly urgent information, which had been uncovered for him through his interpretation, as was necessary.

The religious significance of the shift comes with his replacement of the word "brother" in the first hadith he quotes with the word "neighbor" in the last part of the passage and then in his equating the neighbor with the whole human family.[369] For Sha'rāwī believing Muslims have the responsibility to love and weld the human circle together by extending their love beyond their faith community. But he keeps a distinction in his language between the precedence of believers loving and supporting one another as an essential of faith and the type of responsibility incumbent on believers to extend this love to their neighbors and to all of humanity, although this is still a weighty responsibility.

Moreover, in his extension of the principle of love for others he uses the term *kāda* (almost) when extending the love of neighbor to include (almost) the whole world. As we explored in chapter three with our look at Sha'rāwī's philosophy of renewal we see here that he did not want to break with past understandings of Muslim duty. Instead

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[368] This was especially relevant for him as an 'alim because he no longer possessed the power to formulate an official legal reaction. Sha'rāwī did issue many religious edicts (fatāwa) but these no longer had influence on the law as they once might have. They were issued, like his sermons, for purposes of edification.

[369] "'Not one of you [will] **believe** completely until he loves for his **brother** what he loves for himself'" becomes, "We find the whole universe connected in love …. connecting whoever loves for his **neighbor** what he loves for himself."

he attempted to build a new type of behavior, using accepted duty as his base and extending, through the ḥadīth, an already established principle. We must also notice a distinction for Sha‘rāwī between the religious obligations of the individual (which Sha‘rāwī did not question) and what is religiously sanctioned for the good of the entire universe. Both are theological because they are connected to God's expectations, but for Sha‘rāwī only the second category was open to alteration based on contingent necessity.

In order to not just affect but to also direct effort, a novel presenter must offer something that speaks to the people in their time and place. Sha‘rāwī saw himself as an ‘alim who came to renew religion not only for the technological and scientific age, but also for the age of globalization. Hence he formulated his idea of love of neighbor according to the necessity of balancing God's scale in the contemporary world through equality by achieving free passage between Muslims and non-Muslims. To characterize his mission this way is to see it as driven by the reality of the people he preached to, and the world they inhabited. This is how he originated novel pronouncements, he built upon the past with current interpretation. It is also important to note that for Sha‘rāwī renewal itself was driven by the populace in a much more direct way that it had previously been. What Sha‘rāwī did was set forth a new standard of ethical behavior, one appropriate to his lifetime.

➣ Part 2: Use of Technological Innovatioon

It is Sha‘rāwī's use of television that most exemplifies most how his project of renewal was driven by the needs of the populace. The medium of television allowed Sha‘rāwī to reach the people in the context of their everyday lives. We can also extend our understanding of Sha‘rāwī's push for the unity of the subjects of the nation, and by extension the world, if we look at his use of television. This is because television is the place where the "multiple communities" of the nation intersect, because every member of the nation can tune in no matter what religious group they belong to.[370] It doesn't dissolve inequities but allows a new formation of relationships between different communities of actors. It is also a way in which viewers now receive religious edification as autonomous subjects governing themselves and their own behavior.

Actually because of his charm and manner of speech, as well as the familiar manner in which he talked, Sha‘rāwī's style of preaching was perfectly suited to televised broadcasting. In addition by choosing to broadcast his sermons on television Sha‘rāwī proved that not only was he able to assimilate new circumstances but also that he was willing to explore new ways to make that assimilation successful. At the same time in broadcasting his sermons Sha‘rāwī adapted the mediatory function of the ‘ulamā' in order to infuse the usual activities of the people with the theological. It was for this purpose that he wanted to establish his presence in the media, to reach as many people as possible and to utilize a means that was entrenched in modern life for the purposes of

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[370] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Drama of Nationhood*, p. 15.

delivering a contemporary sermon. He did this to teach the people how to respond to, and participate in, elements of contemporary life while remaining faithful Muslims.

But the change in the way religious communication was relayed also affected the long-term form of religious admonition. While the absorption of technical innovation by religious authorities such as Shaykh Sha'rāwī shows the necessity of integrating such innovation for the continuance of the tradition; in utilizing this media Sha'rāwī also altered how established phenomenon functioned. For example, in the innovation of televised preaching Sha'rāwī both increased the relevance of the 'alim-preacher and at the same time removed this relevance from institutions of religion such as Al-Azhar and even, to a certain extent, the mosque. Therefore the effects, although they were mixed when it comes to the continuation of certain traditional configurations, were necessary and definite. There is also no doubt that by using television for religious purposes Sha'rāwī increased the profile of the ulamā as transmitters of religious knowledge.

Sha'rāwī use of the media can help us distinctly identify a deeper alteration to religious discourse and practice through the modification of its dissemination and approbation. Adjustments in how the viewer encountered the message, which resulted in an increased agency through choice and variation, allowed individuals to more actively infuse the texts of religion with meaning.[371] But deeper adaptation can be sensed in the

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[371] Stewart M. Hoover *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion and Culture*, edited by Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 1-6. Hoover claims that individuals and individual communities engage with media to actively construct meaning. Also see Lila Abu-Lughod in Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain, edited by Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000) p. 6.

way that televised religion mixes the sacred and the profane, especially in how it newly mediates the revelatory text resulting in a new configuration of public and private space.[372] It is my contention that all of these considerations have worked in tandem to not just subtly amend discourse and practice but to also assure that this populist means of transmission would become seamlessly woven into the fabric of official religion.

The use of media was also the most astute example of how Sha‘rāwī attempted to syncretize divine truth with the actual daily existence of his audience, this time not in the content of his sermons but in the way he delivered them. Sha‘rāwī opted to broadcast on television because he believed that that was the way his summoning would reach the greatest number of people.[373] But in making this decision he already recognized that the public had at least indirectly decided the medium based on what would most likely capture their attention.

Additionally, by delivering his sermons on television Sha‘rāwī chose a medium which had relatively recently become an unselfconscious part of Egyptian life. Television was also, up until the time of Sha‘rāwī‘s broadcast career, something exclusively used for non-religious purposes, often to help Egyptians acclimate to their lives as subjects of the Egyptian nation. So in broadcasting his lessons on television

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She describes the way in which “objects shift in meaning as they move through regimes and circuits of exchange. This argument like that of the active audience theorists, challenges the ontology of the text, arguing instead that the meaning of texts or objects is enacted through practices of reception.”

[372] Stewart M. Hoover and Shalini S. Venturelli, *“The Category of the Religious: The Blindspot of Contemporary Media Theory?”* Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 13(1996), pp.251-260. Dale F. Eickelman and Armando Salvatore *Public Islam and the Common Good,* edited by Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman,(Leiden: Brill, 2004) pp. 3-27. They define the public sphere as, “the site where contests take place over the definition of the ‘common good’ and also of the virtues, obligations, and rights that members of society require for the common good to be realized.” (5)

[373] Interviews Cairo Egypt, Summer 2008.

Sha'rāwī was also attempting to incorporate a potential threat, one that competed with religious messages for a viewer's attention and sometimes, when the government used television to try to form a specific national identity, his/her loyalty.

Lila Abu-Lughod has written extensively on television watching in average Egyptian homes. She claims that in Egypt the family and school are the primary places of conditioning subjects in the language of the nation and that because television is in the home it helps in this conditioning.[374] But even though television was instituted under President Nasser specifically to enhance the nationalizing project,[375] it was religious edification that became the concern after Nasser, under President Sadat. The Egyptian government in the 1970's sought out religious preachers like Sha'rāwī to put forth moderate religious messages on television with the full intention of influencing religious discourse. For the purposes of the government the use of television to engender certain loyalties amongst the people was continuous, but the focus of those loyalties changed as the political reality changed. Religious broadcasting in Egypt in the late twentieth century therefore became inextricable interwoven with government intentions to engender nationalist and religious allegiances. Thus it has aided in forming a particular religious disposition within the community of the nation.

But as Lila Abu-Lughod and Walter Armbrust have shown, the Egyptian government, or even the producers of Egyptian television programs, do not ultimately

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[374] Lila Abu-Lughod. "*Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt,"* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005, p. 10
[375] Abu-Lughod, p. 25

control what the viewing public does with the messages they receive.[376] Abu-Lughod surmises that Egyptian viewers come to their own conclusions about television programs and are not easily manipulated by the underlying intentions of those who make the programs available. Instead Egyptians formulate their own ideas about programs based on how what they see and hear relates to their lives.[377] This becomes clearer if we consider the average television viewer, and how even though she watches material that has been censored for specific purposes, she can control when and what she watches based on her own tastes and how she chooses to use her time. In addition each television program competes with every other program and with other medium to capture and sustain her interest long enough to be interpreted for meaning.

Hence television increases the agency of the viewer within the sphere of control that the government and television producers have over the content of programs. This increased agency is possible within these restraints because the viewer is deciding how she will be "controlled by the world in certain ways and not others."[378] Agency then is the choice within multiple possibilities, which are available through the attempted control and within it. In terms of preaching this means that the preacher and the religious message become one of a number of choices, most of which are secular, that the viewer has within specific limits.

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[376] Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernization in Egypt,* Cambridge University Press, New York, 1996. Lila Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood*.
[377] Lila Abou Lughod, *Dreams of Nationhood*, p. 44.
[378] Asad, *Formations of the Secular,* p. 73,

The viewer's interpretation can also be extended into realms of new meaning. General theories of the semiotics of discourse have put forth the idea that every discursive text allows for many possible interpreted meanings. According to this view discourse, as it is related through signs, is not decided, but instead it remains in flux between possibilities which are determined pragmatically.[379] Discourses received through television are opened even further to this indecision because television presents signs in competing ways, for example as visual and auditory stimulus, or as spoken words, and sometimes these signs themselves compete for the viewer's attention. The increased possibilities for deriving meaning from the signs encoded in media modifies the text by opening it further to the interpreter who otherwise may have interpreted the text, as sign, in a more limited way. In addition television, unlike print media or seeing a sermon delivered live, changes the materiality of the sign, which can change the way a person will understand what it signifies.[380] The televised message can be controlled and can also be reinforced through multiple viewings, or in print, it is also usually received in the home, which we will see has various effects.

When religious teachings are presented on television they are also being conveyed through a medium that is not neutral and therefore leaves a mark on those very teachings and their relation to the community they reach. Television, when used to broadcast religious texts, becomes one more intermediary between the viewer and the revelation,

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[379] Jacob, Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1999, p. 94.
[380] Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1999, p. 90-100.

but a novel one in many respects, because it is controlled by non-religious actors and is normally used for non-religious purposes. It has been noted, for example, that those who control what gets transmitted through media are often beholden to their own, mostly monetary, self-interest.[381] Thus when adherents begin to rely on television, and this holds true for other medium, for religious advice the people ultimately responsible for what they receive probably have little ability to judge what is being said and/or are often not focused on the reliability of the content.[382] Furhtermore, little needs to be said about the credentials of those who appear on television to preach as long as they are appealing and therefore serve the interests of the stations and producers.

The diffusion of control over the message is furthered by the fact that television preachers are competing in realms and with actors who are not usually associated with religious edification.[383] Therefore the viewer may receive spiritual instruction mixed with other types of information and images. Viewers can switch back and forth between a preacher's admonition and mundane, sometimes even antithetical, ideas. But at the same time television, by competing with secularly concerned messages, helps to mitigate the negative effects of some of them by offering religious sermons or lessons as an alternative. In the way that television has integrated the religious into this worldly form,

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[381] Hent de Vries *Religion and Media*, edited by Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) pp. 3-42.

[382] Although it is true that recently Egypt television content has been censored by the religious establishment, (See Abdo, 1999), satellite television has opened the field of possibilities even further. In addition there are many messages on satellite television that have a specific ideological content, therefore televised religion is often used to spread certain points of view to larger audiences.

[383] Hent de Vries *Religion and Media*, edited by Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) pp. 3-42.

it is said that television performs a "resacralization of culture."[384] The effects of religious broadcasting are mixed; while there is a new competition in the realm of who and how revelatory ideas are conveyed, the sermons of 'ulamā' such as Sha'rāwī have larger audiences than ever, allowing an even greater reinforcement of the message. But there is no doubt that religious transmissions have also increased variation among practitioners and preachers alike. While television allows religious preachers the ability to help mitigate negative effects, at the same time it makes religious instruction appear less sanctimonious, even perhaps trite, because it is placed in a medium associated with the non-religious, one controlled by the viewer and other non-religious actors.

This allows a further mix of the transcendent and mundane, one that extends the temporal aspects of the individualization of Islamic ritual behavior, by allowing that behavior to be engaged according to individual priorities. Partly this is because television presentations are delivered in a more particularized and personalized way. Individuals can now decide based on their own temporal and pragmatic concerns how and when they will receive edification. Televised religion receives valiance precisely because it integrates religion into the everyday instead of requiring daily tasks to cease for ritual performance. Watching devotional programs is not just a question of receiving edification but of centering it, from the moment of reception, in the everyday experience. Therefore while the sermon and the technology used to convey it are not at odds, their

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[384] Stewart M. Hoover and Shalini S. Venturelli, *"The Category of the Religious: The Blindspot of Contemporary Media Theory?"* Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 13(1996), pp.251-260. p. 259

assimilation means that it is the participant who ultimately decides on the appropriate time and space of her performance as reception.

The viewing of televised preachers has in many ways become a type of novel, mundane ritual, especially when they are watched regularly or during times of religious significance. But at the same time these new rituals are more private than they used to be because the sermons are not received in the mosque or in a public space but in the home.[385] Removing sermons from the mosque does not lessen the significance of that institution. The mosque has always been more than a place to say prayers and receive sermons, it is also a symbol of the unity of the community in their religious endeavors, whether that be for prayer, study or even for distributing alms. In addition although religious lessons received in the home have a ritual character this does not mean that they necessarily detract from mosque participation, actually they often compliment and encourage mosque participation. (That is why in Cairo outside of some less official mosques one can find the more politically oriented religious recordings, which often encourage mosque attendance.) In the case of Shaykh Sha‘rāwī his television program was broadcast Friday afternoon, after *jum‘a* prayers. This signified a new form of religious ritual attached on to and complimenting the old, going from sacred space to home, seamlessly integrating the two. Removing spiritual edification from the public space of the mosque and centering it in the family and the home does however add

[385] Of course Islamic practice has always highlighted the individual nature of worship, believers need not enter a mosque to pray. But temporally and spatially matters are decided for the believer. Even when Muslims pray alone at home they must prepare themselves and their space for such engagement.

significance to the new place of reception. This signifies a rearranging of how public and private are involved in religious enactment.

Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman have explained the public sphere with reference to discourse by saying that discourse mediates what is shared by a community, if that discourse is considered authoritative by all. This in turn allows the community sharing this discourse to have certain expectations of one another through the way they are educated into understanding the contours of this shared public. For Salvatore and Eickelman this perpetuates the notion of a stable tradition in which what is expected of all participants is taught, handed down through the generations and at any particular time, but nonetheless remain flexible.[386]

But televised religion makes it more difficult to define what is public in distinction to what is private according to their definition. This calls for a closer look at the terms on which our understanding of the distinction rely. Their view of public does not necessarily fit in the evaluation of mediated texts, especially those mediated in present technological form, which are received in competition with many varied presentations of authoritative norms. The diversity present on television, especially now with satellite, has made it so that the immediate community no longer "shares" the discourse or the expectations that come from it. (One element in the removal of the religious message from the mosque is to remove it from the local community.) There are so many messages and such large potential communities that it is hard to know who is

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[386] Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman "Muslim Publics" in *Public Islam and the Common Good,* edited by Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman (Brill, Leiden, 2002), pp. 16-18.

sharing what and at which time. Preaching or even just talking about religion on television cannot be easily defined in the way Salvatore and Eickelman have defined notions of the public sphere especially in relation to common public expectations. Multinational communication often blurs the lines between public and counter-public, facilitating an overlapping that often translates into a mix of different hegemonic discourses and the mix of hegemony and diversity within each presentation. It is this new public medium that often destabilizes the notion of shared norms and standards among those who partake in it.

But this blurring of notions of public and private goes even further in televised religion. The publicness of the message is now made by the very media that is received privately in the home. Let's just consider how one watches television; someone sitting home watching TV is not necessarily sharing her habits or practice, although she may be; she may not even be able to discern whether or not she is sharing them or with whom. Without a sense of who her community is she cannot share expectations. She also might have a very private sense of her participation, because she is in the "privacy" of her own home (even when surrounded by family). TV thus makes space for an individualization of the message, even while individuals are sharing the practice of watching, in a way that the mosque or the public square could not.[387] Even the fact that a show may be discussed after watching illustrates the blurring of these categories, does that mean the public show

[387] It is important here to also consider how television opens participation to women in ways that sermons delivered in the mosque or public square may not. As mentioned Sha'rāwī's sermons were delivered in a mosque in front of all male audiences. But when transmitted they are potentially received by both sexes equally.

becomes private during viewing only to be made public again in discussion when norms can actually be shared?

This new mixing of notions of public and private can be seen today in Cairo. One of the concomitant religious developments, along with the proliferation of religious discourse in new and old media forms, is the renewed public display of religious symbols such covering for women (in various forms) and the mark many men have in the middle of their foreheads (called *zabīb* in Cairo, which means "raison") to show that they are avid worshippers. This would seem to support Eickelman and Salvatore's notions of the role of the text in creating shared norms in the public sphere. But there is an interesting way in which the diversity of the messages received has collapsed a sense of shared community in which authoritative decisions concerning behavior are made. Thus making it more likely that adherents will instead latch onto certain behaviors put forth as standard norms. This is less about shared expectations that a community may have and more a simplification of standards. This is appealing precisely because the diversity facing individual adherents removes shared expectations, which then necessitates that the individual decides which standards are important. The social pressure for example for Muslim women to cover their heads in Cairo demonstrates a self-consciousness about which type of dress is appropriate precisely as a result of increased choices. It engenders a sense that standardization is needed to ensure proper behavior, which is often decided by those far removed from a viewer's community.

Going back to Asad this demonstrates the removal of the religious from embodied relationships and highlights individual responses, which then transforms the public square but are not transformed by it. This public expression displays uniformity beyond an immediately known community by extending it beyond recognized borders. Often the focus on particular public demonstrations of behavior actually draws new boundaries around who belongs to any particular community based on these new disembodied standards. This arises because through the media more people have access to the same message but also to many competing messages. Thus diverse representations of true religion are widely disseminated resulting in specific behavioral norms being equated with faith in distinction to other behaviors. Hence media has drastically changed the way religious communities are conceived and formed in the contemporary world.

Moreover, bringing captivating preachers into the home through television has allowed a fixation to develop around various television personalities. The presentation of a powerful presence captivating you individually, entering your home and inspiring you, over and over again, accounts for a certain attachment that grew up around the person of Sha‘rāwī in particular. As mentioned in chapter 5, Sha‘rāwī's picture can be seen everywhere in Cairo, hung by individuals who remain devoted to him. I was told by more sober religious intellectuals that this was an un-Islamic practice, one that concerned them and one they were sure Sha‘rāwī would have disagreed with. But this also represents a subtle change for the average folk, one based on their attachment to the visual presence of the Shaykh and the ways that that has allowed them to find comfort in

a familiarity with the representation of his presence. Television allowed a man like Sha‘rāwī, through his engagement with peoples everyday lives, to become more than an inaccessible authority figure in their lives. In this sense media has reconfigured usual notions of what actually constitutes religious authority because now it can also be based more on a personalized presence as much as on other forms of sanctioning.

Hanging pictures of Sha‘rāwī was not just about the devotion to him as a saint, it also signified a new type of attachment to him as a media figure. The use of a visual representation so common today signifies one of the changes to practice that have been derived from mixing the realms of the sacred and mundane. Additionally, Sha‘rāwī's transmissions came to depend on the media to reach the public and therefore added a novel element to the whole process of religious dissemination. But this dependence did not result in an undermining of Islamic institutions; instead the adjustment was more nuanced. Sha‘rāwī's messages were received through the medium of television, therefore elements associated with religious dissemination were transformed; what was once enacted as a religious event, the edification of the believing public by specially trained ‘ulamā’ now became a media event, one which potentially passed by producers, sensors, and others who were not religious trained. Yet, television allowed Sha‘rāwī to facilitate the increase of religious participation by responding to the people through a newly expressive media. Since television was transmitted to them within the context of their daily lives, usually in their homes at certain ritually important moments, his messages represented the religious sentiment of the present. Furthermore, while television

strengthened his words by offering a multiple sensed reality, it also threw this certainty into confusion as any transmission competes with so many others, and with whatever else is going on at the time it is received.

Conclusion

In broadcasting on television Sha‘rāwī probably did not anticipate the full extent to which television would change religious transmission and reception. Nonetheless television, because it is not neutral, neither in the way it is dependent upon non-religious actors and messages nor in the way it is received, does amend the way believers relate to the structures of religion as a whole. Religious teachings received through televised broadcasts leave the question of religion's role in the public and private lives of individuals in flux. It also blurs the lines between what constitutes sacred and mundane activities. Furthermore, television increases the role of choice for individuals, decreasing the controlling influence of past religious forms. Increased choice also means that religious sermons have to compete with other messages now available to the believing public.

This has opened up a way for us to examine religious discourse in competition, which is to see it as effected by considerations of its appeal. As a result in this chapter we looked at audience driven elements of religious discourse and how as contingencies they necessitate modification in the way religious knowledge is transmitted, in the syncretization of new ideas and established truths. We began with an example of how

audience reception was incorporated into the message. Not necessarily through innovative means, but in novel ways because metaphors and stories incorporate new ways of understanding the truths they represent. Although metaphors and stories are among the most common means used by preachers to facilitate the reception of religious ideas, for this same reason they serve as ideal forms in which preachers can incorporate recent ideas into religious discourse. This allows the preacher to analyze newly influential notions in terms of the religious perspective. Thus the preacher puts forth his vision of when and how the religious perspective may necessitate rejection of new information if that information countervails the basis of faith.

When we moved to examine how Sha'rāwī used his ideas of renewal to respond to the changed reality of the world we saw a different type of response: one of adaptation. Sha'rāwī adapted scientific, technological, medical and global perspectives to divine revelation by trying to fully grasp their import and then searching the texts for responses. By looking to the example of Sha'rāwī's method of adaptation through the extension of past understandings according to information brought forth from revelation, we began to understand how the religious perspective is able to see change as a part of God's disclosure to humanity. This disclosure for Sha'rāwī needed to be examined and responded to according to his understanding of the revelation.

Finally by looking at innovations in technology we saw the largest adjustment in interpretation because of changes in reception and in the forms surrounding that reception. These changes were introduced by Sha'rāwī when he began broadcasting his

sermons, even though in many ways he did so inadvertently. But all of the factors of adaptation that we considered in this chapter indicate Sha‘rāwī’s strategy of considering the receivers and the contingencies of their lives when choosing the content of his lessons as well as the appropriate way they should be arranged and transmitted.

Conclusion

Shaykh Muḥammad Mitwallī Sha‘rāwī was a typical Islamic preacher, and yet within the context of contemporary Egypt he was unique in many ways. Since he was an ‘alim of twentieth century Egypt, a time when the ‘ulamā’ were dispossessed of many of their former duties, Sha‘rāwī utilized one of the only means of transmission left open to him, the discursive practice of preaching, and in this he was not alone. Yet, the trend among popular television preachers today, only a decade after Sha‘rāwī death, is to focus on explaining and defining practice according to religious law. Like many of these preachers Sha‘rāwī's ultimate concern was to summon people to God, but his program focused on the fundamentals necessary for understanding proper action and not on action itself. Sha‘rāwī taught believers the necessity of following God's prescribed method, the easy path that has been laid out for humanity in the revelation, which he likened to an instruction booklet. For Sha‘rāwī this meant that every choice a believer makes, every incident of independent volition exercised, should be governing by God's intended method for humanity. With this concept Sha‘rāwī extended human responsibility while reinforcing the necessity of obligatory duty. Thus we can characterize his program as one of renewal, which he transmitted to the people of Egypt in his weekly television sermons. As one who preached renewal he was primarily concerned with giving direct instruction to the people; his sermons were not geared towards other religious scholars.

Instead he interacted with the changes of his time by searching the revelation and formulating a response, which he then relayed to his audience.

Simultaneously, because Sha'rāwī believed that God's method was laid out in revelation, he also confirmed that the Qur'an and hadith need to be interpreted anew in every generation in order to offer instructions when the "movements of life" (or changes in contingencies) bring new issues to bear. Sha'rāwī elicited relevant responses from revelation not by rejecting the hermeneutic outcomes he inherited but by supplementing (or reevaluating) the interpretations of the past. Sha'rāwī's method was moderate, he did not break with the tradition he represented, nor did he call for an outright rejection of modern conditions. His intermediary position also affirmed the gentleness of God's prescriptions for humanity because, according to Sha'rāwī, although God set forth his method to be followed, that method was not meant to burden believers. Instead he believed that believers should participate in the world around them, as long as they understand that world according to God's intentions for humanity as laid out in the revelation. This view helped Sha'rāwī affirm the position that God desires for humanity to follow the law out of love and not because they are forced to do so.

Hence, Sha'rawi was the people's preacher; his sermons were meant to renew faith for the people according to their concepts and abilities. While Islamic religious scholars are usually studied according to their legal vocation, the discursive form of preaching extends their duties beyond legal responsibility. Preaching is a pliant vocation; sermons often include material that would not be allowed to those who assume other

religious functions. Furthermore, preaching relies on the relationship between the preacher and the audience, which means that the ‘alim preacher must depend on more than acquired knowledge if he wishes be effective. This results in a greater fluidity in the categories of religious authority associated with Islamic preachers. Sha‘rāwī was perceived as someone who lived as a pious example of the knowledge he imparted to others. He was also one who claimed a special ability to interpret scripture for the people because of his training. Additionally, because Sha‘rāwī’s hermeneutics depended on knowledge of both the exoteric and the esoteric, he was understood by his followers to possess both, which is evident in the stories the people of Egypt told me about him.

Sha‘rāwī’s was an aggregate authority, one comprised of the different types of knowledge he possessed and of how he was perceived as a holy man by his followers, and all of these aspects were interdependent. Furthermore, the means of adaptation he used to update the revelatory message for the people extended the magnitude of his influence. When a religious leader is influential as a preacher among the people he/she often intermingles categories and methods in novel ways. At any moment, and throughout time, conditions shift depending on contingent circumstances. Therefore, what a preacher needs in order to gain the compliance of the people will vary. This is especially evident in the modern period in Egypt, a time when many religious actors, even within the ranks of the ‘ulamā’, combined various aspects of authority.

Some of these authoritative characteristics can be traced directly back to Muhammad, others were newly necessitated by the overreaching effects of modernity on

religions institutions. Hence we must begin to view religious authority according to the vocation of individuals in their own time and place and, if possible, according to their words and works, in order to grasp how those classifications are aggregated both ambitiously and subtly. However, the central categories associated with authority should not be abandoned; instead they need to be modified as is appropriate to the function of religious actors according to the circumstances in which they function. Thus, categories can be adapted to actual phenomena, instead of adapting phenomena to the categories, a practice that inevitably leads to constricted, or even worse, erroneous results. The ‘alim preacher, because he is usually associated with transmitting religious knowledge directly to the people, often merges prophetic categories of authority in original ways and in unprecedented combinations.

As a religious agent, especially one who engages the public in discourse that evokes and modifies tradition, the ‘alim preacher can engage various religious perspectives depending on his purposes, which is why the vocation of preaching has been controversial almost since its inception in Islamic history. Comprehending the full importance of an ‘alim preacher such as Sha’rāwī requires looking at the constituent parts that comprise the whole picture of his effectiveness. One essential element has been how people have imbued his life with meaning, which can be detected in the stories that are told about him. Many of these stories highlight their perceptions of Sha’rāwī as a holy man. However, the fact that his disciples and family stress particular occurrences in his life signifies more than a sense of his authority. Recurring themes in the narrative of a

twentieth century ‘alim preacher also help make clear the sociological and historical influence of the Islamic religious tradition during that time period. When sacred narratives are repeated, they signify how notions of holiness are at play at any given moment because their recounting means that they have been accepted and confirmed. By examining what remains important to believers amidst inevitable change, a picture of how people relate to standards of piety over time begins to emerge. In the modern context this is important because it has been a time of upheaval for institutions of religion, which has resulted in modifications of belief and practice. This upheaval has also affected how and from whom Egyptian Muslims received religious instruction.

Sacred narratives also reveal how an ‘alim preacher like Sha‘rāwī remained important to the people by highlighting the areas of his program that gained the greatest acceptance. In Sha‘rāwī’s case it meant acceptance of his call for renewed interpretation of the sources and recognition of him as the one capable of performing that task. His theory of renewal involved examining information as it came to light because Sha‘rāwī believed that all correct knowledge could be found in revelation. In weighing, for example, scientific theories in the scales of revelation he attempted to adapt new theories to divine disclosures. Thus he clarified the continued importance of religious instruction in the contemporary era, especially for those who were seeking spiritual guidance.

In his expositions about knowledge Sha‘rāwī identified the secular aspects of human knowledge that had taken precedence in the modern period, and he explained how they must be grasped in the context of theological truths. Sha‘rāwī’s epistemology was

based on the notion that God is constantly disclosing new information, bringing forth knowledge from the esoteric to be witnessed, and that the affirmation of this knowledge could be found in the revelation when it was properly interpreted by religious specialists. He affirmed that only religious experts, those specially trained, could serve as intermediaries between the revelation and the people. He did so through his articulations and as an example of a representative of his hermeneutic tradition. This was how Sha'rāwi reinforced the necessity of the hermeneutics of those specially trained in the religious sciences; by answering the question of why the 'ulamā, and no one else, were appropriate guides for believers in the modern era. Thus he refuted the possibility that those trained in secular knowledge could be trusted to explicate the Qur'an, thereby placing his specialty above all of the others. Furthermore this position affirmed the need for 'ulamā' to be present and effective in every generation in order to mediate God's constant disclosures to humanity.

Sha'rāwī's epistemology, however, included a reliance on both exoteric and esoteric knowledge. His influence among the people could partially be attributed to the fact that they believed that as a result of his piety, God had granted him apprehension of the esoteric. His followers also imbued his life with miraculous occurrences, such as the healing of the sick. This does not necessarily mean that those who believed in Sha'rāwī's esoteric gifts were adherents to Sufism. Instead these ideas, while they relied on Sufi principles, were, in Sha'rāwī's case, related to the source and use of his knowledge, which gave them a broader appeal. Sha'rāwī's use of esoteric knowledge illustrates how

such notions can be realized outside of their official connection to Sufism and how they can be manifested in conceptions of piety and authority.

While Sufism has gone through various alterations in the modern and pre-modern periods, concepts regarding the special talents of the holy man have remained stable. This is one example of how, although the modern era was one of immense change in Egyptian religious life, stability has continued in the face of structural change. The reinforcement of the stable elements of religious traditions becomes effective as they are animated through human choice and decision. Thus illustrating the absolute connection between discourse and practice. Dispositions that are articulated by a religious agent in discourse are embodied, and result in, a person's capacities for action. Yet, since they are put forth in discourse those dispositions are bordered by religious structures. But, when those structures breakdown, as in the modern era, they need to be reinforced by being reformulated to bring adherents back under their control. One of the ways the preacher does so successfully is by incorporating into the sermon whatever influences adherents outside of religious structures, especially if those influences have played a part in the need for reformulation.

Sha'rāwī's method was to present newly influential particulars in religious terms; formulating a reaction based on his religious perspective. Yet, Sha'rāwī's purpose in reacting was not to reject these particulars, but to affirm the revelation. He used his ideas of renewal to respond to the changed reality of his world in order to attempt to adapt contingencies. At times however he was also willing to adjust well recognized notions of

faith in order to keep religion relevant and applicable for the people. But he did not hesitate to reject information that necessitated denial of the basis of faith. As part of his program of renewal Sha‘rāwī put forth all three responses: rejection of threats, adaptation of reality to eternal truths and alteration of religious forms for the sake of survival.

We examined specific examples of all each aspect of Sha‘rāwī's tripartite theory of renewal according the themes of each chapter. Even though some of those decisions do not seem to indicate a consistency in his method, if we see his overall concern to be that of enforcing the primacy of the revelation, then it becomes clear that they do not contradict one another. So while Sha‘rāwi corrected past Quranic interpretations that disputed certain contemporary scientific theories, he also rejected scientific theories if they threatened to undermine belief in the veracity the Qur'an. He used his scriptural knowledge to extended Muslim responsibility to include all of humanity in order for God's scales to be balanced. But he also issued an innovative opinion concerning the throne of God based on information he received in dreams. In each of these examples we have a different type of response. How does one label a religious scholar who both accepts and rejects scientific postulations? Or one who relies on his exoteric and esoteric knowledge to renew the tradition? What is needed in this case is an understanding of the complimentary nature of the elements of Sha‘rāwī's overall project in light of his goals and vocation.

In fact, the example of Sha‘rāwī illustrates the collapse of dichotomous ways of conceiving of religious agents and their programs. ‘Ulamā' like Sha‘rāwī rely, instead,

on affirming the undeniable link between spirit and practice, esoteric/exoteric, love and obedience, and even God's disclosures and scientific knowledge, in order to bring forth new responses from the revelation. For Sha'rāwi each pair was interdependent, complimentary and essential to the full picture of religiosity, because they all originated in a single source. Sha'rāwī's method of adaptation, through the extension of past understandings according to information brought forth from revelation, illustrates that he saw change as a part of God's disclosure to humanity. It also demonstrates why he believed the 'ulamā' were needed as intermediaries between those constant disclosures and the people.

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