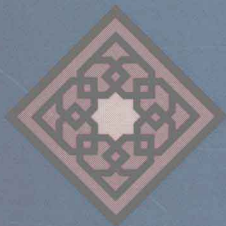


SAYYID QUTB



MILESTONES

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(Revised Translation)

With a foreword by Ahmad Zaki Hammad, Ph.D

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ISBN: 0-89259-076-9

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

**And therefore, then, call (all mankind to
faith), and pursue the right course
steadfastly, as you have been commanded; and
do not follow their vain desires.**

(Al-Qur'an 42:15)

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MILESTONES: THE BOOK, THE MAN

If you are turning to *Milestones* for light reading or amusement, stop here.

It is a work of absolute seriousness—“treason” to some. It was a shot fired by Sayyid Qutb as a warning to humanity, unconsciously perched on that now infamous “brink of a precipice”: If we persist in the ignorance of “Modern *Jabiliyyah*,” East or West, and turn our backs on the Qur’an and the Islamic solution, we will destroy ourselves.

When the Arabic edition first appeared in Cairo in 1964, President Nasser considered the book’s ideas dangerous to his regime and a direct threat to the country’s national security. Sayyid Qutb was quickly arrested and, on Monday morning, August 29, 1966, hanged.

Milestones was banned and confiscated from libraries, bookstores, and homes. Its owners jailed, its readers threatened with ruin, every impounded copy of this little book was burned by military order.

Yet the fiery response burned not the ideas expressed in the book, nor suppressed the desire in the hearts of many to seclude themselves with the forbidden thoughts of freshly martyred Sayyid Qutb. The image of young and inspired university students secretly copying the book by hand, rushing to their closeted readings, will never leave my mind.

Intimacy with *Milestones* was considered an act of heroism among the youth, a testimony to courage. Facility with its new terminologies and striking concepts was a mark of one’s enlightenment and Islamic identity. It was a criminal offense to harbor this book, and thus that act became itself a stand against the very *jabiliyyah* that hanged its author and imprisoned and tortured his family and supporters.

Ironically, the political conflict in the Arab world in the mid-1960’s between the Pan-Arabists and the governments of the then developing “Islamic Solidarity” played an indirect but nonetheless important role in promoting *Milestones* and its author’s vision. Sayyid Qutb’s legacy

swept the Arab world and eventually spread beyond to other Muslim countries. Translations have appeared in Urdu, Turkish, Malay, and Persian, in addition to a number of European languages. *Milestones* has had greater impact on the modern Muslim mind than any other book of recent decades.

And it is surely naive to think the story of *Milestones* is over; that the book has outlived its purpose; that it has receded into the long night of history.

Then what is so "new" in this book to justify its prestige and lasting influence? Why was it a death sentence for its author? In short, there is nothing new in it but renewal itself: the call for the Muslim community to come vigorously into presence, where the lives of every single person in it reflect the "Manners, ideas, concepts, rules, regulations, values, and criteria [of] the Islamic source." *Milestones* is a reminder that in spite of the material and cultural marvels of the West, in spite of the disappearance of Islam as a society and a nation, in spite of the vast gulf between Muslims and the leadership of humanity, that "only in Islam, the way of life, does all humanity become free from the servitude of some people to others, when they can devote themselves to the worship of Allah alone, derive guidance from Him alone and submit themselves to Him alone." The call to renew and remember has been one of consensus in all Islamic revivalist movements, though they vary in tone and method. What is unique about Sayyid Qutb is the spirit that he breathed into these issues and the force of his style in advocating them.

The first few passages of *Milestones* reveal a person free from inferiority complexes, free from the pressures of narrow concerns. He addresses with unshakable confidence an issue that relates to all people: their need for their Lord. He does not hesitate to point out the bankruptcy of glittering Western civilization in its two forms, capitalism and communism, despite their material superiority. He calls upon Muslims not to fix this country 'here' or that situation 'here'—this is too small for Sayyid Qutb—but to lead all humanity to salvation.

Sayyid Qutb did not author *Milestones* to enrich Arabic literature. He was articulating the concept of a new world order for those whom he called the "vanguard" of Islamic revivalism, the youth of the Muslim Brotherhood, "a waiting reality about to be materialized." The chapters of this book—which are milestones along the road to Islamic revivalism—were meant exclusively for this vanguard. But Sayyid Qutb accepted the suggestion of Hasan al-Hudaybi, Hasan al-Banna's successor, to circulate the book among the Muslim public of the Arab world.

In the absence of freedom, the book was considered grounds to

indict its author for conspiring against the ruling ideology and system of government. Bullets replaced proofs, and the gallows were erected instead of open dialogue. Yet the tools of tyranny, as they ever do, failed to lay these thoughts to rest. Rather, they inflamed extremism in the hearts of many attracted to Islam and invited unrest to the streets and the minds of the Arab world.

In reprinting *Milestones*, American Trust Publications makes something of its own statement of reverence for freedom of expression. Perhaps Sayyid Qutb, who lived in the United States from 1948 to 1950, though critical of much in Western civilization, would be pleased to know that freedom in this land allows for the publication in English of one of his most important works.

In my judgment, the translators and editors of *Milestones* did a fair job. However, this work, owing to its historical importance, needs a fresh editing and rereading to bring the English translation closer, and to lend to it the warmth and flow, of the Arabic original.

Finally, Sayyid Qutb, Allah's mercy upon him, is no prophet. What he says represents his understanding of Qur'an and Sunnah. The challenge remains for us, as it did for him, to understand Islam in relation to our context. He fulfilled his trust and left much to be accomplished after him.

Ahmad Zaki Hammad, Ph.D
Chairman, ATP Editorial Board

INTRODUCTION

Mankind today is on the brink of a precipice, not because of the danger of complete annihilation which is hanging over its head—this being just a symptom and not the real disease—but because humanity is devoid of those vital values for its healthy development and real progress. Even Western scholars realize that their civilization is unable to present healthy values for the guidance of mankind and does not possess anything to satisfy its own conscience or justify its existence.

Democracy in the West has become sterile to such an extent that its intellectuals borrow from the systems of the Eastern bloc, especially in the economic sphere, under the name of socialism. It is the same with the Eastern bloc. Foremost among its social theories is Marxism, which in the beginning attracted a large number of people not only from the East but also from the West as a way of life based on a creed. But now Marxism stands intellectually defeated and it is not an exaggeration to say that in practice not a single nation in the world is truly Marxist.

Marxist theory conflicts with man's nature and its needs; it prospers only in a degenerate society or in a society which is tyrannized over a period and becomes docile and cowed as a result of it. But now, even under these extreme circumstances, its materialistic economic system is failing, although this was the only foundation on which its structure was based. The Soviet Union which has been the leader of the Communist countries in Europe and the America's, is itself suffering from shortages of food. During the times of the Tsars, Russia used to produce surplus food, but now it has to import food from abroad and has to sell its reserves of gold for this purpose. The main reason for this is the failure of the system of collective farming, or, one can say more basically, the failure of an entire system that is against human nature.

It is essential for mankind to have new leadership! The leadership

of mankind by the West is now on the decline, not because Western culture has become poor materially or because its economic and military power has become weak. The era of the Western system has come to an end primarily because it has lost those life-giving values that enabled it to be the leader of mankind.

It is necessary for the new leadership to preserve and develop the material fruits of the creative genius of Europe, and also to provide mankind with the high ideals and values previously unknown in the West, that can restore harmony with human nature, in a positive, constructive, and practical way of life.

Islam is the only system that possesses these values and this way of life.

The era dominated by the resurgence of science has also come to an end. This period, which began with the Renaissance in the sixteenth century A.C. and reached its zenith in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, does not possess a spirit capable of reviving a dynamic civilization.

All the nationalistic and chauvinistic ideologies that have appeared in modern times, and all the movements and theories derived from them, have also lost their vitality. In short, all man-made theories, both individualistic and collectivist, have proved to be failures.

At this crucial and bewildering juncture, the time for Islam and the Muslim community has arrived because it has the needed values. Islam does not stand in the way of material progress or prohibit material inventions. Rather, it considers material prosperity and creativity to be an obligation given to man at the very beginning of time, when Allah granted him the vicegerency on earth. Islam regards initiative in multiplying the bounties of Allah on earth with the proper intent as worship of Allah and one of the purposes of man's creation.

And remember the time when your Sustainer said to the angels, "I will create a vicegerent on earth." I have only created jinns and men that they may serve Me.

Thus the turn of the Muslim community has come to fulfill its divinely appointed task for mankind.

You are the best community raised for mankind, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and you believe in Allah.¹

And thus have We made of you a community justly balanced, that you may be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves.²

¹Qur'an 3:110

²Qur'an 2:143

Islam cannot fulfill its role except by taking a concrete form in a society, or more precisely, in a nation. Men do not listen, especially in this age, to an abstract theory which is not seen materialized in a living society. From this point of view, we can say that the Muslim community has been extinct for a few centuries, for this Muslim community does not denote the name of a land in which Islam resides, nor is it a people whose forefathers lived under the Islamic system at some earlier time. It is the name of a group of people whose manners, ideas and concepts, rules and regulations, values and criteria, are all derived from the Islamic source, so that the Muslims' way of life is an example to all mankind, just as the Messenger is an example to them: "And thus have We made of you a community justly balanced that you may be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves."

Islam cannot fulfill its role except by providing the leadership for all of mankind, for which the Muslim community must be restored to its original form. That Muslim community is now buried under the debris of the man-made traditions of several generations and is crushed under the weight of those false laws and customs that are not even remotely related to the Islamic teachings. In spite of all this the modern Muslim world calls itself the "world of Islam." I am aware that between the attempt at "revival" and the attainment of "leadership" there is a great distance, as the Muslim community has long ago vanished from existence and the leadership of mankind has long since passed to other ideologies and other nations, other concepts and other systems. This was the era during which Europe's genius created its marvelous works in science, culture, law, and material production, due to which mankind has progressed to great heights of creativity and material comfort. It is not easy to find fault with the inventors of such marvelous things, especially since what we call the "world of Islam" is completely devoid of all this beauty.

But the growing bankruptcy of Western civilization makes it necessary to revive Islam. The distance between the revival of Islam and the attainment of world leadership may be vast, and there may be great difficulties on the way; but the first step must be taken towards this revival.

If we are to perform our task with insight and wisdom, we must first clearly know the nature of the qualities on the basis of which the Muslim community can fulfill its obligation as the leader of the world. This is essential so that we may not commit any blunders at the very first stage of its reconstruction and revival.

The Muslim community today is neither capable of nor is required to present before mankind great genius in material inventions, such

as would make the world bow its head before its supremacy and thus re-establish once more its world leadership. Europe's creative mind is far ahead in this area, and for a few centuries to come we cannot expect to compete with Europe and attain supremacy over it in these fields.

Hence we must have some other quality, a quality that modern civilization does not possess.

But this does not mean that we should neglect material progress. We should also give our full attention and effort in this direction, not because at this stage it is an essential requirement for attaining the leadership of mankind, but because it is an essential condition for our very existence. Islam elevates man to the position of vicegerent of Allah on earth, and, under certain conditions, considers the responsibilities of this vicegerency as worship of Allah and the purpose of man's creation. The responsibility of this vicegerency includes the material progress that comes from multiplying the bounties of Allah.

To attain the leadership of mankind, we must have something to offer besides material progress, and this other quality can only be a faith and a way of life that both promotes the benefits of modern science and technology and fulfills basic human needs. The same effort that has produced material comfort and leisure should be exerted to design and apply technology in meeting the minimum needs of the poor. And then this faith and way of life must take concrete form in a human society—in other words, in a Muslim society.

If we look at the sources and foundations of modern modes of living, it becomes clear that the whole world is steeped in *jabiliyyah*, and all the marvelous material comforts and advanced inventions do not diminish its ignorance. This *jabiliyyah* is based on rebellion against the sovereignty of Allah on earth. It attempts to transfer to man one of the greatest attributes of Allah, namely sovereignty, by making some men lords over others. It does so not in the simple and primitive ways of the ancient *jabiliyyah*, but in the more subtle form of claiming that the right to create values, to legislate rules of collective behavior, and to choose a way of life rests with men, without regard to what Allah has prescribed. The result of this rebellion against the authority of Allah is the oppression of His creatures. Thus the humiliation of the common man under the communist systems and the exploitation of individual and nations due to the greed for wealth and imperialism under capitalist systems are but a corollary of the rebellion against the authority of Allah and the denial of the dignity of man bestowed upon him by Allah.

In this respect, Islam's way of life is unique, for in systems other than Islam, people worship others in one form or another. Only in the Islamic way of life do all men become free from the servitude of some

men to others and devote themselves to the worship of Allah alone, deriving guidance from Him alone, and bowing before Him alone.

This dignity of man in submission to Allah is where the roads separate, and this is the new concept that we possess and can present to mankind. This concept and the way of life covering all the practical aspects of man's life is the vital message that mankind lacks. We call it the Islamic *din*. It is not a product of Western invention nor of European genius, whether of "socialism" or "capitalism."

Without doubt, we are able to offer this *din* which is perfect to the highest degree, and which most of mankind still knows only dimly and is not capable of "producing." But as we have stated before, the beauty of this new system cannot be appreciated unless it takes a concrete form. It is essential that a community arrange its affairs according to it and show it to the world. In order to bring this about, we need to initiate the movement of Islamic revival in some Muslim country. Only such a revivalist movement will eventually—sooner or later—attain world leadership.

How to initiate the revival of Islam? A vanguard must set out with this determination and then keep going, marching through the vast ocean of *jabiliyyah* which encompasses the entire world. During its course, this vanguard, while distancing itself somewhat aloof from this all-encompassing *jabiliyyah* should also retain contacts with it.

The Muslims in this vanguard must know the landmarks and the milestones on the road to this goal so that they would know the starting point as well as the nature, the responsibilities, and the ultimate purpose of this long journey. Not only this, but they ought to be aware of their position vis-a-vis this *jabiliyyah*, which has struck its stakes throughout the earth. They must know when to cooperate with others and when to separate from them; what characteristics and qualities they should cultivate; and with what characteristics and qualities the *jabiliyyah*, immediately surrounding them, is armed; how to address the people of *jabiliyyah* in the language of Islam; what topics and problems to discuss with them; and where and how to obtain guidance in all these matters.

The milestones will necessarily be determined in the light of the first source of this faith—the Noble Qur'an—and from its basic teachings. The milestones will reflect the concept that the Qur'an created in the minds of the first generation of Muslims, those whom Allah raised to fulfill His will, those who did change the course of human history in the direction ordained by Allah.

I have written Milestones for this vanguard, which I consider to be a waiting reality about to be materialized. Four chapters are taken from my commentary, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, which I have changed here and

there slightly to suit the topic. This introduction and the other chapters I wrote at various times. In writing these chapters I have set down the deep truths that I grasped during my meditation over the way of life presented in the Noble Qur'an. These thoughts may appear random and disconnected, but one thing is common in them. These thoughts are milestones on the road, and it is the nature of signs along the road to be disconnected. Taken together, these writings are the first installment of a series, and with Allah's help I hope to write more on this topic. And Allah alone grants guidance.

Chapter I

THE UNIQUE QUR'ANIC GENERATION

The callers to Islam of every country and of every period should give thought to one particular aspect of the history of Islam, and they should ponder over it deeply. This is related to the method of inviting people to Islam and its ways of training.

At one time this Message created a generation without any parallel in the history of Islam, even in the entire history of man, the generation of the Companions of the Prophet (may Allah be pleased with them). After this, no other generation of this calibre was ever again to be found. It is true that we do find some individuals of this calibre here and there in history, but never again did a great number of such people exist in one region as was the case during the first period of Islam.

This is an obvious truth and a fact of history, and we ought to ponder over it deeply to fathom its innermost secret.

The Qur'an which enshrines this Message is still in our hands, and the hadith of the Messenger of Allah, peace be on him, his guidance in practical affairs, and the history of his sacred life are also in tact, as they were in the hands of the first Muslim community whose likes history could never again produce. The only difference is the absence of the Messenger of Allah, peace be on him; but is this the secret? Had the person of the Prophet, peace be on him, been absolutely essential for the establishment and fruition of this message, Allah would not have made Islam a universal message, ordained it as the religion for the whole of mankind, given it the status of the last Divine Message for humanity, and made it to be a guide for all the inhabitants of this planet in all their affairs until the end of time.

Allah has taken the responsibility for preserving the Noble Qur'an on Himself because He knows that Islam can be established and can

benefit mankind even after the time of the Prophet, peace be on him. Hence He called His Prophet, peace be on him, back to His mercy after twenty three years of messengership and declared this religion to be valid until the end of time. The absence of the Messenger of Allah, peace be on him, is not the real cause or explanation of this phenomenon.

We must look, therefore, for some other reasons to explain the uniqueness of this first generation, and for this purpose we must look at that clear spring from which the first generation of Muslims quenched their thirst. Perhaps something has been mixed with that clear spring. We should look at the manner in which they received their training. Perhaps some changes have found their way into it.

The spring from which the Companions of the Prophet, peace be on him, drank was the Noble Qur'an; only the Qur'an, since the hadith of the Prophet, Peace be on him, and his teachings were an offshoot of this fountainhead. When someone asked the Mother of the Faithful, 'Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, about the character of the Prophet, peace be on him, she answered, "His character was the Qur'an." The Noble Qur'an was the only source from which they quenched their thirst, and this was the only mold after which they modelled their lives. This was the only guidance for them, not because there was no civilization or culture or science or books or schools. Indeed, there was Roman culture, its civilization, its books and its laws, which even today are considered to be the foundation of European culture. There was the heritage of Greek culture—its logic, its philosophy and its arts, which are still a source of inspiration for Western thought. There was the Persian civilization, its art, its poetry and its legends, and its religion and system of government. There were many other civilizations, near or far, such as the Indian and Chinese cultures. The Roman and Persian cultures were established to the north and to the south of the Arabian peninsula, while the Jews and Christians were settled in the heart of Arabia. Thus we believe that this generation did not place sole reliance on the book of Allah for the understanding of their religion because of any ignorance of civilization and culture, but it was all according to a well thought out plan and method. An example of this purpose is found in the displeasure expressed by the Messenger of Allah, peace be on him, when 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, brought some pages from the Torah. The Messenger of Allah, peace be on him, said, "By Allah, even if Moses had been alive among you today, he would have no recourse except to follow me." It is clear from this incident that the Messenger of Allah, peace be on him, deliberately limited the first generation of Muslims, which was undergoing the initial stages of training, to only