In this chapter concerning ideological aspects of the MB movement, we now present three themes primarily associated with Hassan Al-Bannā: Islam as a way of life, the support of gradual reforms at the individual and social level, and Muslim unity. These are the guiding stars in the firmament of Brotherhood thought, and principles that are agreed on by most Brothers in Europe. Still, they are susceptible to minor adjustments.

Other precepts are also regularly legitimated via association with the founder of the MB, but we will deal with them in chapters to come, in conjunction with other themes to be discussed. We could take for example the importance of joining daily religious practice to faith (Al-imān wa-l-‘amal): faith must be joined to action; one cannot be fully Muslim without practicing one’s religion. This credo rests upon several principles, a high value placed upon worship practices, virtues and good morals, the acquisition of knowledge and the accomplishment of any Islamic task, taking responsibility and putting forth effort, but also upon a global system of punishment and reward to regulate one’s entire life (the worst punishments occurring after death in the other world).

Before we delve into the topic, two points should be made. On one side all the conference participants with whom we spoke are more or less associated with the MB, but we cannot always distinguish partisans from sympathizers. Taken together they express a diversity of attitudes, and some of them are quite critical with regard to certain positions, including among others those of Sayyid Qutb.

On another side the themes presented here cover a wide range of topics, but do not claim to set forth in an exhaustive manner the flow of ideas in circulation in MB milieux. The themes mentioned are intended as indicators that help us visualize the manoeuvring room that activists and contemporary preachers have, especially when we compare them to each other.
1. Islam as a way of life: a great classic

This theme is constantly emphasized at most public demonstrations. At the double conference organized at the mosque of Mons-en-Baroeul (in the Lille region), whose two themes were ‘Islam as a way of life’ and ‘Islam: how to live it in Europe?’, both stressed the primordial importance of adopting a complete Islamic way of life.

The Islamic way of life is presented as the secret of Islam’s expansion on a global scale. God lies at the heart of everything, every act, every human intentionality, and every thing and every action is regulated by Islam. Thus, according to Abdallah Benmansour, no aspect of life is left to chance or personal judgment, since God always has something to say about it:

> your respiration, your gestures, your feelings, your feeling of hatred, your feeling of love, the countryside that you’re looking at, the people you are thinking about, the people you speak to, all your gestures are controlled and regulated by Allah. Everything is codified by Islam [...] Everyone has hundreds of thousands of responsibilities, of circles of responsibilities. And each time Islam has something to say about it.

The omniscient presence of God implies that Islamic prescriptions are ever-present for any person who pays attention to them. God demonstrates his omnipotence even in the smallest things: “Islam is involved in almost every insignificant thing.”

This conference speaker recalled that this divine supremacy is necessarily present at the heart of social relations. The divine hegemony is all the more in evidence, inasmuch as each action, and each act of caring directed toward another person—even in simply saying hello—offers us the possibility of conforming to the Islamic way. This speaker concluded his remarks by saying “In just a few seconds, I have applied the entire Sharia.” Thus he showed himself capable of great pragmatism, able to breathe life into the notion of an Islamist utopia, which considers the

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1 Tariq Ramadan also recalls how deeply the divine presence can penetrate the heart of every action, if men only remember this: ‘It is the thought, the remembrance of God in man’s consciousness, that produces the sacred. Thus every action appearing to be free and completely ‘profane’—in terms of hygiene, sexual act, commerce, social engagements etc.—is all sacred as long as God is remembered along with it, and as long as it stays within ethical limits.’ In this discourse, the accent is not placed so much on the normative dimension of Islam, but the speaker replaces it by the necessity of taking ethical imperatives into account [Ramadan, 1996:309].