

Radwan Ziadeh

Islam and Modernity

Abstract

The problem of Islam and modernity has been an important point of discussion in the Arab and Islamic world for decades, though this discussion has taken various forms, such as being called the conflict between the past and the present, or tradition and progress. This discussion has hidden within its clear contradictions when seeking compromise between the Abrahamic religions and present times throughout history. This conflict first appeared in the geographic area known as the Islamic world and looked much like the Age of Enlightenment in Europe in the eighteenth century. However, the true meaning of conflict revolved around the capacity of Islam as a religion to be compatible with modernity and its philosophy, precepts, politics, and historical facts. This means that Islam was obliged to come into agreement with modernity, which became like the soul and language of the present.

Introduction

The question of modernity for Arabic society became an obsession, occupying it for centuries. Even though this question has had different definitions, such as considering modernity to be an historical era, or a group of principles which Westerners believed in during the Age of Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, this does not negate the fact that modernity was a major topic of discussion in a number of fields. We cannot deny that modernity was also a reason to create a compromise between Islam and tradition. Creating this compromise occupied a large portion of Arabic culture and busied a large number of researchers and thinkers. These questions, which were the starting point of this dichotomy, were not limited to merely defining modernity, but also included theories of compatibility. The dichotomy hid inside itself a question about the ability of Islam and tradition to agree with modernity, including its principles and views, which

were created by Western society. Therefore, many Arabs insisted on viewing tradition through the lens of modernity. Many Islamic researchers became convinced that modernity was the soul of the present and questioned whether or not tradition had the ability to agree with the principles of modernity centred on reason, enlightened thought, and secularism or political modernity, which included democracy, human rights, etc.

The problem of Islam and modernity was dealt with by many as a search for commonality, while others searched for points of contention in order to show that, if modernization was to be achieved, Islam would have to be left behind. We can describe this as the Arabic reaction to modernity. And in general, we can say that the questions which Arabic society asked to understand the problem of its relationship with modernity were not exclusively Arabic. In fact, all non-Western societies asked the same questions. If modernity and its entire human heritage couldn't answer these questions, it would fade into history. But its human heritage and historical experience made non-Western societies ask questions of their own traditions to assess to what extent they could participate in and contribute to modernity. So, modernity shocked all societies outside its historical undertaking and affected them through its scientific and technological achievements. But this shock not only affected non-Western societies, it also affected Western societies themselves by forcing them to find answers to the questions that non-Western societies asked of modernity. Postmodernism is a result of non-Western societies' reaction to modernity. Postmodernism's pioneers acknowledge this fact.

So, Western society now lives in a moment of civilizational review (postmodernism constantly reminds it of this fact). This civilizational review is necessary to allow us to say that the project of modernity, which the West created during a period of its history, creates two reactions: the first in non-Western societies, the second inside Western society itself. This period was the real test of (the realism) of modernity's principles and the understanding of its effects.

Although the official door of Islamic reformation has closed in the Sunni world, this has not stopped the development of some reform movements over the centuries. Instead, we find many fatwas and religious scholars which support Islamic reformation and explain that the closing of this door was to prevent the chaos of fatwas and make it possible for only scholars to make them. Regardless, the closure of this door did not prevent the development of religious criticism among Sunnis.

The Question as Seen from the Viewpoint of Muslim Societies

Grasping a period's essence, like creating an expression that describes it, can be complex and difficult to achieve. Though the term modernity is often used to describe the rapid development of technology and information, some have used it in an attempt give expression to the period, or speak on its behalf, in a way that indicates the emergence of new kinds of concepts that have both global and universal features. They are part of the period's essence. Is there any civilization that refuses to be in harmony with this period and its essence? Is there any culture that tries to be far away from the propounded conceptual and epistemic changes that leave their effects on the whole world and influence all civilizations?

The world and the time period have become one thing; just as the world gets smaller in spite of its vastness, as Paul Verelias propagated in his discourse about the end of geography, so the period moves faster and becomes more united at the same time. If history was previously equivalent to histories and dates that differ according to areas and regions, nowadays it is history that all societies participate in making, in spite of the fact that their shares differ – some have increased their portion, while the shares of others are less or even non-existent. This, however, doesn't annul the unity of history, as opposed to the one-sided history we used to talk about in the past. Presenting ourselves to the period necessarily means being able to deal with its reality. This, therefore, makes it our duty to reformulate our discourse in such a way that it will express our essential nature on the one hand, while being in harmony with the issues and latest developments imposed by the period on the other hand. Unless we do so, we will stay outside history, as some have gambled (Mansour, 1991) and as such, the age throws out those who insist on coming into it with ancient language, the time for which has elapsed and the expressions and terms of which have become so old-fashioned.

Thus, we can say that modernization of Islam has always been put forth as a response to the questions of any period with all its interlaced complexities. Modernization, therefore, has always been an ambitious response seeking to answer these questions in accordance with keeping up with the period and the ability to renew, which means throwing wide open the door of creativity with all of its possible achievements that may be brought about and created by a mind full of solicitous questions which certainly requires necessary and quick responses.

Throughout their history, Arabs and Muslims have always called for modernization, which was a process that accompanied Islam from the very beginning (Al-Orwi, 1995). But does the

current concept of modernization that we are seeking conform to what has always been put forth throughout Islamic history? This requires a comprehensive look into history to see the changes and developments that the term encountered until we reach a level of clarity that can be agreed upon when the term is used or generalized.

Throughout Islamic history, modernization has always been put forth with the meaning of revival or purification, for example, “Purifying the divine religion from the dust that accumulates on it, and representing it in its clear pure original form” (Khan, 1986). Thus, what was sought after from “modernization” was to bring Islam back, or to take us back to it, in its pure form, its first pure moment. This requires “purifying the Muslims of out-dated beliefs such as superstitious concepts, heterodox trends, and implicit or explicit elements of polytheism” (Al-Hameed).

Reformers have always been at the head of this trend. Their objectives were realized by freeing religion from the false conceptions that had accumulated around it, so that we are brought back to the true Islam of our good forefathers. He who goes over the books which enumerate the reformers will often find them laying stress on this meaning as the main standard to be appealed to when reformers were identified during the early Islamic centuries. “Predicting Those Whom Allah Would Send at the End of Each Hundred Years” by Jalal-ud-din al-Sayyoti, who died in the tenth century of the Hijra, and “The Aim of the Formers, the Donation of the Diligents and the Masterworks of the Rightly Guided” by al - Muraghi al - Jerjawi, together with other writers, confirm that the reformer is the one who renovates religion after false conceptions have accumulated in the people’s minds. However, we must be attentive to the various defects in these books which adopted either doctrinal classification – according to al - Sayyoti all reformers were from al - Shafi’i categories – or sectarian classifications as we can see in the complaints against Ibn - al - Athir’s “Jam’ al - Soul” where he considered the two *Shi’ite* imams, Abu - Ja’fer and al - Murtada, as reformers. This was considered a grave mistake:

Because the *Shi’ite* scholars don’t deserve the designation of ‘reformer’ even if they reach the highest ranks of scholarship or become most famous. How can they renovate while they are destroying religion [so]? How can they revive traditions while they are deadening them? How can they wipe heterodoxies off while putting them into circulation?” (Al-Hak Al-Aseem Adbadi, 1995). [End note #1]

Although the term “purification” is used less often than the more famous term “revival,” (i.e., reviving religion and its scholarship, or reviving religion in the minds, according to al - Ghazali), the two utterances give the same meaning, perform the same function, and refer to an almost identical concept of religion as it existed in the first Islamic period. Since our understanding and concept of religion is now nearly complete, reviving it, therefore, means renewing it in our minds, to become consistent with our good “forefathers” concept of this religion.

Modernization, therefore, is a revival process that is primarily a kind of psychological gamble, followed by a shift towards transformation. It is work that must be done until religion in its first form, at the time of the prophet’s companions, has been realized.

First, this approach takes its plausibility from history. Throughout Islamic history reform movements did not go beyond this function. Or rather, they actually didn’t need more than that. Secondly, this approach was based on the fact that there is no modernization, reformation, or renovation in Islam, but only in Muslims – at least, according to the famous title of a book by Omar Farroukh. Anyone who looked at the matter in a different way was to be accused of violating what had been ratified by the nation’s ancestors: “There is a trend the followers of which have explained modernization and given it a meaning different from what had been known to Muslims all over the ages: an interpretation which none of the Muslims predecessors or successors imams have approved” (Tahhan, 1984).

We can say with great confidence that most explanations given for the meaning of “renovation” or “modernization” throughout Islamic history remained the same for many succeeding generations because of the static mentality to which they were subject (Al-Hajj, 1999). But with the beginning of the twentieth century, the concept of modernization took on new significance. A special vocabulary developed, and other synonyms were used to perform the problematic role expressed by the concept of renovation. Jurisprudence and development were used in the Islamic intellectual field. The terms modernity and modernization were more present in Arabic rhetoric, which considered the Western model as the only standard to be imitated for the development and progress of other civilizations and patterns outside the Western system.

However, modernization, like any other newly-used concept, needed a period of time through which it could be checked on two planes: intellectually, for its ability to fulfil the function and objective attached to it; and historically, to free it from historical obscurity and rehabilitate it as a key conception intrinsically necessary for rereading the heritage according to this, the correct

vision (Hanafi, 1992), all the while leaving an area of freedom that allows us to understand the Islamic religion according to the spirit and requirements of the age and the present reality.

Thus, we can say that during the twentieth century the concept of modernization was subject to transformations that helped to crystallize and fully develop it. However, this concept is still subject to the same back-and-forth pull that all ideological trends are subject to, which stands in the way of its cognitive development and reemploys it in a vicious circle fluctuating between allegation and indictment.

Here, we will try to view the development of the concept of modernization by reviewing the books that dealt with it as a separate term, while allowing that, other books, which did not include the word modernization in their title, have also played a similarly important role in instigating its crystallization process. And so, we will set out to peruse what we call the modernization heritage in the twentieth century. During this century, which witnessed the epistemic and problematic emergence of the term, the expression of modernization underwent various phases. As the term progressed through its course, there were questions put forth which insisted upon having answers. In these questions, we find justification to designate three main phases, phases of three questions.

Modernization and the Question of Legitimacy

With the beginning of the first Arab-Western contact, when the Arab and Muslim peoples started to understand Western progress with its important cultural, technological, and scientific achievements, Arabic Muslims became restless with their taken-for-granted facts, dreaming of catching up with the process of progress and development. This realization was initially impressionistic, inspired with so much passion and enthusiasm that it prevented the creation of the critical consciousness required at that stage for identifying the factors and mechanisms of Western progress as well as its social, political, economic, and military pillars.

At first, this contact created an unintelligible sense – which became clear with the lapse of time – of the necessity of reconsidering the existing traditional system and thinking about Muslim “backwardness” and “the secret of [Western] progress.” This historical moment lived by the Arabs and Muslims had left behind various, even conflicting, theories. The attitudes and visions of this differed, but they all had in common the question of modernization, which all factions tried to prove the possibility of putting forth and making fixed, legitimate, and possible.

However, they did not settle for simplified questions such as “what is modernization for?” because such simple queries did not precisely express the obsessions and passions of those who put them forth. They all wanted to propose theory-like questions or projects that would enable them to advance. For this purpose, they made use of other questions in which the utterance “modernization” did not exist. They inquired about the cause of the Muslims’ backwardness, the secret of the Europeans’ progress, and the Oriental case (in view of the fact that all Oriental societies live the same development crisis and called for reform and change). But, finally, all of these questions insistently poured out into an ideological authority. It was an authority that laid the foundation of backwardness or, at least, created a knowledge that did not make us ready to enter the age and its culture. This authority, therefore, was a target for questioning and the subject of intellectual conflict at that time.

This authority is the heritage of the Arab Islamic culture throughout its long centuries, a heritage on which the contemporary Arab Islamic intellect was founded. That is why the first question directed to this heritage concerns its capability to be modernized from within, its ability to fall in line with existing circumstances, and the responses required for it to be open to progress, development, and change.

The first answer to this question denied any possibility of modernization from within this intellectual system, which was created by tradition. This was the point of view of a number of Orientalists, led by Hanotaux, Renan and others, who considered this heritage as an obstacle to renovation and progress. Yet some of them confused what is called heritage, which is an intellectual product of different trends, with Islam, a religion from within which it is difficult to seek modernization. Hamilton Jip draws a comparison between Christianity and Islam, considering that “The Church and Christian societies mutually secure constant vitality: the Church plays the role of a historical accumulator and a tool at the disposal of the Christian conscience, throughout the Christian experience. The Church constitutes a continuously repeated renewable element, giving this experience its inclination and efficiency at the same time”. But Jip’s concept of Islam is exactly the opposite: “[T]he Islamic religious establishment together with its members constitute a symmetrical synthesis, where each element is formed to influence the other element as long as Islam kept on as a living institution and as long as its beliefs kept on satisfying the religious conscience of its followers” (Hamilton Jip). Thus, it goes without saying that if the Islamic world wanted to rebuild and recreate its progress and development, it would

have to “adopt the principles of its special historical criticism that goes back to the beginning of Islam, as well as relying on the elements of the Western methods which seem necessary and possible” (Jip). The modernization question imposed here, therefore, has its special context which is necessarily based on Islam’s inability to reform and progress, i.e., relinquishing it and correlating with the ideal example that could achieve its progress on the basis of its cognitive system and the nature of its historical formation.

This view had been formulated on the basis of a particular conception of civilization and history, which only saw progress as a single pattern that had been achieved and realized. All patterns that aspired to achieve progress had to follow this one pattern; it was an inevitable path from which there was no way to separate. Although this Western centrality would later be criticized and refuted by many philosophers and thinkers (headed by Foucault, Straus, Derrida and others, and then by post-modernism as a whole), it was firmly established at the beginning of the twentieth century for different reasons and circumstances which can be summed up in the nature of the historical phase existing at that time. Along with all of these conflicting data and thoughts, the modernization question would emerge again. But this time it emerged on the Arab and Islamic level, and not because of Orientalists or those who adopted the Western viewpoint. Yet, for the same reason for which the Orientalist modernization question was created, it would be limited to the realm of reactivity. That is to say, it would impose the modernization question not as a necessity to get out of what was existent, but as a response to the possibility of achieving it within the inherited intellectual system. This is what I meant by the legitimacy question.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a great number of writers attempted to pose the modernization question as a possible project in the Islamic heritage. This compelled them to reconsider this heritage and the Islamic religion, to reveal aspects of it that can be invested and used in contemporary reality.

There are two prominent books we notice in this period. The first is by Muhammad Iqbal, whose first Arabic translation appeared in 1955 under the title “Renovating Religious Thinking in Islam”. The second book, by Abdul- Muta’l al- Saidi, appeared in the same year under the title “Reformers in Islam.” End note #2].

These books presented the view that at certain times, modernization in Islam is not only possible, but it is also legitimate and required. Muhammad Iqbal, for instance, confirms that the Islamic world “is provided with valid deep thinking and novel experiences, and it has to

courageously set out to complete the reformation waiting for it” (Iqbal, 1968). But he did not penetrate more deeply into what kind of reform mechanisms would be required. Had he done so, it would have been with some bashfulness because he aimed at affirming that jurisprudence, which is, the full right of legislating (as he calls it), is theoretically possible. According to him, the Sunnis have acknowledged this, even though they have always denied its practical application since the creeds were founded. This is because full jurisprudence was restricted by preconditions that are almost impossible to be found in one person (Iqbal, 1968). Consequently, the “principle of movement” in Islam, which is the same as jurisprudence according to Iqbal, stayed static.

What can be clearly noticed in Iqbal’s passages is a feeling of vulnerability. He feels as if he were standing between the edges of two swords which he can’t overstep. On the one hand, traditional Muslims would inevitably deny him his courage in asking and calling for reform; on the other, some Orientalists stress Islamic passivity and inability to call for modernization and progress. Al – Mutanabbi’s verses hold true for Iqbal, as well: “Other than the Byzantines in front, there are Byzantines behind your back so, on which of your two sides would you depart?”

Iqbal seems to have settled the matter with the first party about the necessity to call for jurisprudence and reform, but he could not come to a resolution with the second party by overstepping this restricted imposition of a Western intellectual system that continuously practices its centrality. He continued to play the role of defender of Islam’s liability to progress and advocator of Islam’s ability to reform at all times. He repeated this by continually posing questions to himself such as: “We have to consider whether the structure and history of Islamic law prove the possibility of reinterpreting the rules and principles of the law; in other words: is Islamic law capable of modernizing?” (Iqbal, 1968) [End note #3].

In trying to answer these questions, we find Iqbal obliged to quote some Orientalists’ statements, such as those of Horton and others, which confirm that the Islamic spirit is spacious and tolerant, knowing almost no limitations, and that it assimilated all the ideas it could get from neighbouring nations. Then he quotes Hergennie, the Dutch scholar:

[R]eading the historical development of the Mohammedan law we find, on the one hand, that the scholars, in each generation, defame each other for the simplest things to the extent that they charge one another with heresy, and on the other hand, we find those

scholars themselves, with the great identity of intention they have in common, trying to compromise the ancestors' disputes which are similar to their own (Iqbal, 1968).

After all that, Iqbal concludes that all these opinions expressed by the European reformation scholars show clearly that when new life comes back to the Muslims, the freedom of thought implicit in the Islamic spirit will inevitably manifest itself in spite of the scholars' strictness. After this introduction which he considers necessary, at least to drive back his Orientalist opponents, we see him exposing his personal opinion:

My opinion is that what the present generation of the free Muslim thinkers profess about reinterpreting the original principles of law, in the light of their experiences and as a response to the changes that have taken place, is a fully justified viewpoint. Moreover, the *Qur'anic* decree that existence is a creation, which gradually grows and develops, requires that each generation has the right to be guided by what has been inherited from the ancestors, provided that this heritage would not stand in the way of thinking, judgment and solving special problems (Iqbal, 1968) [End note #4].

Iqbal thinks that modernization in Islam is possible, even required and necessary in some original principles. Presenting his opinion about consensus, analogy, and prophetic tradition, he states:

It is impossible to deny that those who classified the prophetic tradition have rendered a great service to the Islamic law by desisting from the abstract theoretical thought to observing the significance of the existing circumstances. If we kept on studying what had been written about the prophetic tradition and concerned ourselves with scrutinizing the spirit by which the prophet interpreted his message, this study might manifest a great benefit for understanding the value of life in the law principles stated by the *Qur'an*. Such understanding alone concerns us when we try to reinterpret the origins of the legal principles (Iqbal, 1968).

Just as what he had imposed did not go beyond what may be considered an attempt to harmonize Islam with modern life and its existing facts, later on he tries to impose a reform philosophy necessary for all humanity living a deeply-rooted spiritual crisis—without which it would be impossible to escape:

Humanity nowadays needs three things; interpreting the universe spiritually, liberating the individual spirit, and putting forth greatly important essential principles to direct the

development of human society on a spiritual basis. There is no doubt that modern Europe has established ideal systems based on these grounds, but the experience showed that the facts uncovered by the pure mind are unable to ignite the firebrand of the true strong faith; religion alone can ignite this firebrand. This is why absolute thinking did not have much influence on people, while religion could always uplift individuals and change human groups, as a whole, transforming them from one state to another (Iqbal, 1968).

Thus, what is required from this “reformist philosophy”, according to Iqbal’s mystic-poetic language, is to revive the soul and ignite the ember of faith which is capable of renewing the meaning of life, giving it a new life. Here, Iqbal’s understanding of modernization and reform is based on his concept of religion and religious life, as he calls it. According to him, it can be divided into three phases: faith, thought, and reconnaissance.

In the first phase, religious life is a form of a system to which the individual and the nation as a whole must surrender, without busying the mind with understanding its distant objectives or intentions. This trend may have great results for the social-political history of a certain people, but it is not so effective on the spiritual development of the individual and the extension of his horizon. The mind’s understanding of this system and the far source of its authority follow this phase, characterized by absolute surrender to a certain system. In the second phase the religious life looks for its origin in a kind of metaphysics (theology). This is a logically harmonious contemplation of the universe; one of its branches is contemplation of God’s being.

In the third phase, however, reconnaissance and psychology are replaced by metaphysics, and the religious life increases man’s aspiration to make direct contact with the final truth. Here religion becomes a matter of personal representation of life and omnipotence. The individual gains a “free personality, not by disengaging himself from legal limitations, but by uncovering its far source in the depth of his own consciousness” (Iqbal, 1968).

Dividing religious life into phases, Iqbal analyzes Auguste Comte’s positivism, which divides the development of human thought into three phases: the theological phase, the metaphysical phase, and the resultant positivism (Mashiri, 1994). Note that Iqbal bestows his subjective spiritual tendency upon Comte’s positivism because the standard Iqbal uses in this classification is not based on philosophy or the general system of the concepts of human knowledge, as was the case with Comte (Mashiri, 1994). Rather, it is based on the spiritual development of man which ends up manifesting the essence within him. To use a mystic expression quoted from ibn-

‘Arabi: “Man looks for his essence while the greatest world lies inside him.” Therefore, it is not abnormal in his concept of modernization and criticism of tradition to rest on the spiritual life by which the human being is exalted. Iqbal asserts that restricting oneself to old fundamentals damages one’s religion as well as any other human activity. However, the most notable entity that tradition destroys is “the freedom of the creative person, and thus inhibits the openings of spiritual revelation” (Iqbal, 1968). Religion, in the end, is no more than “one’s purposeful effort to come to the final end by which he can construe the powers of his personal essence” (Iqbal, 1968). Iqbal concludes his book with verses that are closer to mystic symbolism than reformation. This important quote, from a long poem at the end of his book, is most expressive of Iqbal’s “spirit”.

*Look thyself in God’s luminosity
 If thy piety in the presence of his light
 Were firmly established,
 Consider thyself alive and eternal like him.
 Tie thyself knot and cling to thy small entity.
 This is the way for man to cultivate his essence
 And test its splendour in the brightness of the sun
 Resume disciplining thy old surrounding circumstances
 And set up a new entity.
 Such is the entity of truth
 Otherwise, thyself is no-more than a vicious circle of smoke (Iqbal, 1968).*

The second book depicting the phase “The Question of Legitimacy,” is of less intellectual value than its predecessor. In his book “Reformers in Islam,” Abdul-Muta’l al-Saidi references the reformers from the death of the prophet to the present era to prove that “Islam has the ability to be modernized at any period in time” (Al-Sai’di). He targets those who reject reform and deny the possibility of its realization in Islam. “As long as Islam aims toward the general uplifting of humanity, the means of this uplifting will proceed with general development, not stopping at any limited boundary and, thus, it differs from worshipping” (Al-Sai’di). Therefore, he explores the history of modernizers in Islam, studying it as the history of Muslims’ development in their worldly matters. He recounts the reformers chronologically, referring to the centuries in which they were alive, beginning with Abu Bakr-Es-Sedîq and ending with Abdul-Azîz Aal-Sa’ud. His

list differs from the old reform historians such as al-Sayyoti and al-Muraghi al-Jerjawi. This distinction implies his aversion to the former method; however, he did not indicate the specific characteristics that he expects to be exemplified in reformers. He concludes by listing what he calls the impediments to modernization, which can be summarized as:

1. Modern Muslim kings' and princes' adherence to their absolute regimes.
2. The reformers of the past centuries were not all-inclusive: they carried out some reforms and left some, and that which they left had its effect on the failure of what they performed.
3. Over the centuries, the majority of religious scholars remained passive. Few paid attentions to reform and common people stood behind those passive scholars. Reformers were followed by such a small number of people that there were not enough to take the reform upon themselves or to have a force corresponding to that of those who were passive.
4. Muslim kings and princes did not support the reform movements in their countries; rather they considered them to be revolutions led by the reformers against those kings and princes, so they spared no effort to fight them.
5. European states opposed every modernization movement among Muslim populations and would launch wars to distract them from these movements whenever a Muslim nation adopted reforms (Al-Sai'di).

According to Abdul-Muta'l al-Sai'di, these are the main reasons that prevented Muslims from accomplishing reform and modernization: "If we want to proceed through future, we must know what stood in the way of success and avoid the mistakes of the past to follow the right path and adopt successful methods of reform" (Al-Sai'di). If one wants to closely examine causes that he considered to be a hindrance to reformation, one will find commonalities between the various points. The first of these commonalities is the fact that they are all purely political causes, whether directly related to political power, or to those who represented it. This supports what al-Saidi meant when he said that it was not intellectual or religious reformation, but political modernization. He demonstrates this by his noticeable, repeated use of the term 'reformation' to the extent that mentioning it was only a kind of contact with the antiquated scholasticism that he followed. According to his intellectual concept, modernization and reform was beyond what he was contemplating. But what seems interesting is his emphasis on the comprehensiveness of the

concept of reform, since realizing it fully requires its comprehensive success. This thorough concept of reform is almost identical with what was previously imposed by al-Sayyoti and others, who stated that reformation can only be realized by changing circumstances and life-style (i.e., stressing the practical side of concepts of reformation, taking into consideration the entanglement of economic, intellectual, social and political fields). Reformation, therefore, can be abbreviated by the modern concept of progress; when progress (i.e., all-inclusive revival in all life fields) takes place, reform can be considered as completed or realized. This is what Al-Saidi states in the concluding section of his book, in which he criticizes the Muslims' adherence to the idea of the expected leader (Mahdi). He asks them to replace it with the idea of the expected reformist, who would inspire them and bring people to a period of peace and rapport (Al-Sai'di).

The difference we note between Iqbal's spiritual reformation concept and al-Saudi's concept of all-inclusive reform or comprehensive revival is no more than a variation of interpretation (i.e., they both acknowledge the possibility of reformation in Islam and investigate its legitimacy). Both authors try to carry out a reformation reading of Islam, so to speak, to confirm that Islam itself both inspires and requires such a reading. Neither of them, however, consider reformation to be a necessity required by the aggravated state of affairs in which Muslims lived. Instead, they try to attribute Muslim's backwardness to Islam. They reformulate the question when they suggest that Muslims are the cause of Islam's backwardness, stating that they could not read and interpret Islam in a way that reveals the unprecedented characteristics it possesses.

Modernization and the Question of Necessity

As mentioned above, modernization in the twentieth century was an answer to a question that had not been initially grown on Muslim soil, a question which prompted many people in the traditional Islamic field to doubt it, fear it, and criticize its messengers. Because of this, settling the concept of modernization in the Islamic world needed a period of time until the questions had reached their limit and encouraged the consideration they deserved. Then the question of modernization as an inevitable necessity without which there is no salvation was re-imposed. People re-contemplated the question and found that it had a lot of acceptability and credibility, regardless of its source or adopters. Thus, the question of modernization was re-imposed, not from a position of legitimacy or possibility, but from a position of necessity.

“Reformers in Islam” by Amin Al-Khouly (1992) is considered one of the most prominent books expressing these ideas as a whole. In his book, the writer targets two goals. The first is to recognize the originators of this heritage: those who believe in reformation, speak directly about religious reformation, describe it, recount it chronologically, and designate the reformers at the end of each of the fourteen centuries that Islam has witnessed up till now. The second is to bring one of these heritage texts back to life, as an act of loyalty and devotion towards it, and to expose its originators’ thought, as well as their treatment of the critical issues and the way they gave expression to them in those periods (Al-Khouly, 1992).

Reading Al-Khouly’s explanation for mentioning each cause, we find that they are almost the same:

If the originators of the heritage spoke about modernization, then there would be nothing left to be said or objected to, and the concept of reformation would no longer be a heterodoxy for people to dispute about . . . We, also, would not waste time and efforts in that wrangles which increase and become absurd whenever a serious attempt is carried out to drive the social or religious life to its unavoidable advance, development, and progress, and to fulfil the arising needs of groups and individuals (Al-Khouly, 1992).

The author tries to rely heavily on the heritage to first establish legitimacy to his speech, and then to transfer this legitimacy to contemporary reality and its requirements; thus “our” need to reform will be the same as that of “our ancestors.” The only difference is that they have predated us. He states this frankly in his explanation of the second cause, as follows:

[I]f the forefathers had originated the idea of modernization and designated its men, we would have the right to complete the idea of reform and its limits by thinking about the lives of those whom they designated as the reformers at the end of each century, searching in the works of their rulers and the thinking of their intellectuals for what lights they may send from the past to illuminate the path of the future. Thus, availing ourselves of these works and thoughts would be based on a solid foundation of the ancient options and on a state of reality made by those who had once been granted the right to reform (Al-Khouly, 1992).

He wants to make use of the “ancestors’ authority” and invest it in his modern needs. But what prompts us to inquire further is his insistence on bringing the reformer’s biography out of its old form and into our modern life. He describes that biographical writing as “reformist.” One

countering traditional biographical writing which typically settles for a general outline of his life, his personality, and the intellectual phases he underwent, while this book of his is based, as he says “on explaining the ideas and opinions that aimed at correcting our understanding of religion and showing us the right way to work” (Al-Khouly, 1992). Al-Khouly’s aim, in this work, is to establish an appeal for changing this exaggerated actuality under the title of modernization. If anyone brought an allegation against this call, he would be handed over to our ancestors, who had been the first to adopt such methods. This is exactly the wording which he has repeated and affirmed many times:

The aim, therefore, is to support the idea of modernization and, then, to define and clarify it. The soul is obsessed by a feeling of the urgent need for progressive reformation through which Islam, which determines continuity and immortality for itself, could be vividly understood and released from all things that may endanger this continuity or stand in the way of its immortality, if this new understanding is intended (Al-Khouly, 1992).

Consolidating the call for modernization in the Islamic environment seems to need all these confirmations and authorities to appear as a pure Islamic request. He, therefore, rereads modernization beginning with the heritage and ending with the contemporary actuality.

By ‘reformation’ the ancients mean giving life to the Sunna, killing heterodoxy, or reviving what has been obliterated. Sometimes you see them having practical inclination when they celebrate the importance of modernization in jurisprudence, the law of practical life for them. We see them giving preference to one reformer over the other, because the preferred is a scholar who defends the branches, while the other is a theologian who defends the doctrines and principles (Al-Khouly, 1992).

Al-Khouly continues by citing as examples that al-Sabki in “*Tabaqat al-Shafi’iah al-Kobra*” considered ibn-Suriege, the Shafi’ite jurist, not abal-Hasan al-Ash’ari, the reformer of the third century, while ibn- Asaker considered al-Ash’ari the reformer because he stood up for the Sunna, and as a reaction against al-Mu’tazilite and all other kinds of the heretics and perverters.

There are many aspects that confirm the ancients’ practical tendency in modernization, including the following:

1. Some caliphs are considered reformers; they all agree that Omar ibn -Abdul Aziz is the first unrivalled reformer at the end of the first century (after the Prophet

- Mohammed) and they state clearly that “the basis for preserving religion is maintaining the policy rule, spreading justice and equality by which bloodshed is prevented and the rules of law are established”. This is also reinforced by the fact that they joined scholars of each century to rulers. In the second century (after Mohammed) Haroun ar-Rasheed is joined with al-Shafi’i, in the third al-Muqtader Bellah with ibn –Suriege, in the fourth al-Qader Bellah with Abi- Hamed al-Asfarayeni, and in the fifth al-Mustadher Bellah with al-Ghazali.
2. They considered the title “religious reformer” as a practical, social rank, similar to the outward caliphate and the great imamate. It is even of such importance that some of them uplift it to the rank of prophethood. They say that if there were a prophet after Mohammed, it would be al-Ghazali, whose miracles are clear in some of his works. They also agree with what al-Sayyoti says at the end of his book, “The Prediction”: “Every one hundred years philosophers and scholars in this nation die, and then God sends a number of philosophers similar to the number of prophets. They bring people back to Allah and they are considered as the prophets of the time.”
 3. Interpreting reform at the end of each century, they attribute it to the reality of collective life events during that period of time; social tribulations require modernization to make up for the weakness they have caused, as they say.
 4. What reinforces the practical tendency is their consideration that “the reformers may become numerous in the same century, when each of them works in one of the practical or scientific fields, because some may be helpful while others are not.”

All of these points confirm the all-inclusive understanding of the above-mentioned modernization which often correlates to revival and points it out, as if reform, according to Al-Khouly, were “a periodical social revolution, managed by a person who knows life, belongs to it and has deep ideas about it” (Al-Khouly, 1992). He reverts to connecting modernization with progress, not to stress Islam’s capability of progress, but to insist on the necessity of reform for understanding Islam. Alone, it is capable of bringing us out of our contemporary critical situation and making us enter the realm of development and progress.

Reformation, which is progress, is not to bring back an old thing that has once existed, but it is to discover a new one that existed after it had not been, whether discovering this new was by taking it from an old that had existed, or by making every effort to infer this

new after it had not been existent. Progress is not easily understood through reviving what has been obliterated, as it is said in the meaning of reformation (Al-Khouly, 1992). Al-Khouly ends up considering reform to be progress itself, and one of the universe's rubrics without which life would not be intact.

Reform, whose stability in the life of religion and occurrence in every move of life has been determined by the ancients over the centuries, is progress in the outcome. Thus it is the confirmation of the law to which all beings surrender, whether they were physical or incorporeal beings (Al-Khouly, 1992).

But what follows all that? Does any speech about modernization actually result in reform? It is not necessarily so, yet this represents a phase that must be experienced. However, the problem lies in remaining in this stage and marking time for a long period, without significant results. If the call for modernization is not accompanied with practical results, which are looked at as a real laboratory for theoretical ideas, it will be lower than the aspiration, and no more than scattered, disconnected ideas on which there is no possibility to depend in the following period of time. This brings us directly into the third phase, the signs of which we are witnessing today.

Modernization and the Question of the Period

Currently, writings about reform and modernization multiply and increase; or rather, calling for renovation has come into "the bidding market" between different Arab ideological trends, to the extent that tradition has become a "sign" of backwardness and reactions. The concept of "modernization," therefore, could strike deep roots in the Arab cultural soil, and become a guiding beacon.

However, the question that insistently imposes itself is this: Is it possible to move the speech about reform as being a question of necessity, to it being a question of practice and action? In other words, did all of these talks about modernization result in reform? Have we moved from talking about modernization to speaking of renovation?

These questions are connected with one axis and take their legitimacy from what is now being imposed in the Arab and Islamic cultural field and the dispute about modernization, its nature, and its mechanisms. Al-Jaberi has concluded his study of the structure of the Arab mentality with a question about the way of practicing modernization as long as reality dictates the imposition of reform as an inevitable necessity.

He responds that there is no answer at all. Reform or modernization is a practice, a historical process. The imposed question, therefore, is not an epistemic one; it is not a question, the answer for which is found in a quantity or a quality of knowledge introduced to the questioner. The imposed question is a “practical” one that finds its renewed, developing, and gradual answer within practice, not before, above, or outside of it (A ‘bed Al’Jaberi, 1996). Yet, he confirms that there is no way to modernize, except from within the heritage itself, and by its private means and potentials in the first place, while simultaneously (and necessarily) getting help from our period through methodical and epistemic means (Al-A’lawi, 1989). [End note #5].

Modernization, as we see, is still marking time without being able to revert to talking about it as a cause or a theory of scientific, practical requirements. This leads us directly to the approach that associates reformation with the socially and politically organized modernization efforts of the nation, in such a way that a dialectical relation between these two sides can be established. We will not be able to achieve reform unless the Arab and Islamic World has been incorporated in a new cultural cycle in which it moves from the state of inertia, penalization, and ineffectiveness to that of action and cultural radiation. Without this transition, intellectual reform will not be realized, but will stay subject to its social and political problems. However, if we initially agree to this approach, we will be faced with a major problem in need of a solution. If the modernization of Islam is subject to getting out of backwardness and belonging to progress and development, as we have seen, then who holds the key of our entrance to the world of modernism, with its crisis in all fields, including social, political and economic domains? Here we enter a vicious circle similar to one without beginning or end: reformation will not be accomplished without revival, and revival will not be realized without reformation in all domains. So, modernization/reform and revival remain suspended for an indefinite period of time.

The theory of modernization, as I see it, must be put forth in its various subdivided contexts (i.e. Modernization is not a mere intellectual product in the field of Islamology, but it is a social, political, and economic theory whose features and formation must be investigated in order to be able to enter what I call “the reform period”).

Still, before we exhibit exaggerated optimism, it must be observed that this reform must rest on two main pillars. The first pillar is to confirm that modernization is not a concoction of the elite; rather it is a feeling which the nation must call for and seek information about, to ask

and strive for it, and consequently try hard to realize it. The second pillar is this: excessive criticism is one of the main phases of modernization. Both criticizing what has preceded, and depending upon it for drawing and carving the outlines of the future, are necessities imposed by the theoretical and practical context which, itself, also requires an all-inclusive revision with every move to a new phase. This is made all the more significant by the daily international transformations and epistemic changes we observe — changes which, before dealing with, we must reconsider what we had been, so we may aspire to the best of what we will be in the future.

Conclusion

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End Notes:

1. Abu-Al-Taieb Muhammad Shams Al-Hak Al-Aseem Abadi (d.1329H.), aon Al-Maabood sharh Senan Abi Daoud (the God Help, explaining the rules of Abi-Daoud), (Beirut: Scientific Books Publishing House, 2nd ed., 1995) ch.6, (p. 263), quoted from: Abd-ur-Rahman Al-Hajj Ebraheem, Renewal from Text to Discourse, Al-Tajdeed Magazine, 3rd year, issueVI, August1999A.D. (p.102).
Abu-Al-Taieb Muhammad Shams Al-Hak Al-Aseem Abadi.
2. Muhammad Iqbal, tajdeed attafkeer addeeni fi Al-Islam (Renovation of Religious thought in Islam), translated by Abbas Mahmood (Cairo: the committee for authorship, translation and publication, 2nd ed., 1968), it is clear that its translator chose the word tajdeed for the English word (reconstruction).
3. We must mark down here that the Islam/development duality, which dominates many writings, directly implies both accusation and refutation, because by linking Islam to development we would get a developed version of Islam unsimilar to the previous one, the thing which has been rejected by many persons. But within this very duality there are other opinions that follow a different course denying Islam potentialities to be renewed or developed; rather, it remains a prisoner of its past,

unable to enter the world of “Modernity,” i.e. the current world. If the Orientalists, as Ernst Rinan, Hanotu, and others have frequently expressed the latter, the renovation in Islam would result in being “a reaction to and a denial of a charge”, in order to prove Islam’s capability for development and renewing. That is what we will clarify later. Yet it can be said that the legitimacy period, or potentiality, was subject to its own time with the accompanying historical and intellectual changes, the thing which requires of us to say that the renovation idea itself has not been, as it were, a repulse against an external attack, rather than an impulse to an internal development.

4. It is clear that Iqbal’s poetic and Sufi language leaves its stamp on him even when he deals with philosophic and intellectual issues, wherein we see a prominent existence of symbols secrets through his approach to the *Qur’an* and existence, this is what was embodied in his divan (self-assertion secrets and self-denial symbols) translated by Abdul-Wahhab Azzam (Cairo:Al-Ma’aref pub. House, 1955).
5. This is what Jamal-Deen Al-A’lawi also concluded, from primary notes on the problem of renewing Islamic thought, within a seminar held by King Abdul-Aziz Aal Saoud Institution for Islamic Studies and Human Sciences, April 3-4 1987. Issued under the title (Renovation of Islamic Thought) (Casablanca: Arabian Cultural Center, 1st ed., 1989), p.136, he says: “Rereading the heritage wouldn’t be of intellectual renewal principles unless it assimilates the conceptual and methodical system crystallized and renewed by the contemporary scientific research. In addition to the epistemic necessity for fulfilling the assimilation process, we must raise it to the rank of required historical predestinations, i.e. those that related with the renewal not the unlimited ones”. We can find the same thing with Dr. Hamed Rabee’, intellectual renewal of Islamic heritage and the nationalist consciousness revival process (Damascus: Ajjalil House, 1st ed., 1982), although Dr. Rabee’ discussed what can be called the political renovation within the Islamic and Arabian heritage perspective.