



**A Note on Some Recent
Western Writing
on Islamic Resurgence**

Author

Dr. Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi

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Chapter 1 : Introduction



This article revolves around certain presuppositions, themes, and theories related to a selected number of Western writings on Islamic resurgence in the modern Arab world. In this regard, I purport to examine the following claims:

(1) Islamic resurgence is a widespread traditional, cultural, and political phenomenon in modern Islam;

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(2) some Western (and even Muslim) studies of Islamic resurgence have only touched the surface, and, therefore, their methodological orientation has been inadequate;

(3) as a facet of modern Islam, Islamic resurgence has reinterpreted the Islamic tradition in a creative and unique way; and (4) although the major leaders of the Islamic movement have placed philosophy outside the pale of Islam, one is tempted to study Islamic resurgence as a philosophical expression of modern and contemporary Muslim societies. [1]

In order to show the theoretical inadequacy of the writings on Islamic revivalism, I would like to discuss four major recent studies: (1) Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*; [2] (2) William M. Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*; [3] (3) Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies*, [4] and (4) Ronald Nettler, *Past Trials and Present Tribulations*. [5]

Notes:

[1]. Sayyid Qutb criticizes philosophy in general, and argues that it lacks inspiration and a sense of praxis: "We must make it clear, however, that we do not desire to seek the truths of the Islamic concept merely for the sake of academic knowledge. We have no desire to add still another book to the shelves of Islamic libraries under the heading of 'Islamic philosophy'." Sayyid Qutb, *The Islamic Concept and its Characteristics*, tr. Mohammed M. Siddiqui (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1991), p. 5.

[2]. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[3]. (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

[4]. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[5]. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1987).

Chapter 2 : First Study

In *Radical Islam*, Sivan proposes following two notions: First, to better understand the thinking of

modern Islamic resurgence, especially that of the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, [6] one has to study the influence both of Ibn Taymiyyah of the 14th century and the Pakistani Abu al-'Ala' Mawdudi of the 20th century on Qutb's language and thought. Second, Islamic revival is basically defensive and anti-modern. In addition, the modernity/jahiliyyah polarity (read as modernity/tradition polarity) provides the most adequate approach to study the dynamics of modern Islam. [7]

Sivan's takes a political-theological approach to discuss the history of Arab societies in the past three decades. In other words, his objective is to analyze the connection between "political Islam" and society in selected Arab countries, especially Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. To my mind, the book is highly reductionist and selective and does not adequately portray the historical dynamics between religious institutions, ideas, and personalities, on the one hand, and Arab society, on the other. Sivan uses a multitude of terms to refer to the phenomenon of Islamism, such as radical Islam (p. 1); Islamic revival (p. 3); Islamic militancy (p. 11), and fundamentalism (p. 67).

Sivan asserts in the first chapter, "The Mood: Doom and Gloom," that Muslim "fundamentalists" are a pessimistic group of people because they abhor current social and political realities. This aversion to reality has translated itself into a radical political movement which aims at restructuring the status quo.

Thus Sivan reduces Islamism to mere politics: "Islamic revival-while activist and militant-is thus essentially defensive; a sort of holding operation against modernity. And though it has no doubt a sharp political edge, it is primarily a cultural phenomenon. Its very strength proceeds from this alliance of political and cultural protest." [8]

As is common in a lot of Western writings on Islam, the term modernity is used often. Sivan contends that Western modernity, [9] in its economic and intellectual dimensions, presents a special challenge to Muslims: "Western investment means the integration of the Islamic world into the system of the multinationals, which is totally alien to Muslim concepts of interests, insurance, taxation, and so on."

[10] Then he reaches the following major conclusion without providing enough historical evidence and introduction: "Islam thus comes out badly bruised from the encounter with modernity."

[11]

To my mind, the author fails to provide an adequate historical analysis that takes into account the problematic nature of colonization in the Muslim world and its different manifestations, military, economic, cultural, political, religious, and conceptual. [12] Sivan does not consider colonization to be problematic at all; rather, he considers the Muslim rejection of modernity to be the crux of

the matter: "The picture that emerges is not one which scholars studying Islamic society would tend to refute. Modernity has indeed made important gains, especially in recent decades. Islam, although more resilient than other traditional cultures, has seen its position greatly eroded." [13]

Notes:

[6]. See the author's recent article on Sayyid Qutb, Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi`, "Discourse, Power, and Ideology in Modern Islamic Revivalism," *The Muslim World*, Vol. LXXXI (3-4), July-October 1991, pp. 283-298.

[7]. Many scholars follow this approach in the course of their investigation of Islamic resurgence. See the following: Issa Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Modern Arab Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), and Abdallah Labdaoui, *Les nouveaux intellectuels arabes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993).

[8]. Sivan, p. 3.

[9]. On modernity, consult the following: Marshall Berman, *All That Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), and Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

[10]. Sivan, p.10.

[11]. *Ibid.*, p.14.

[12]. Khurshid Ahmad, a contemporary Islamic thinker, insists that colonialism has been the most single important factor in the metamorphosis of modern Muslim societies. See Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi`, ed., *Islamic Resurgence: Challenges, Directions and Future Perspectives*, a Round Table with Khurshid Ahmad (Tampa: The World and Islam Studies Enterprise, 1994), especially chapter three.

[13]. Sivan, p.15.

Chapter 3 : Second Study

The second study is William M. Watt's *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*. [14] In this book, Watt argues that the traditional Islamic worldview is incompatible with the conditions and demands of Western modernity. He contends that the modern Muslim mind is still determined by the epistemological rules of the early phase of Islam-what Muhammad Arkoun might call the Classical Islamic phase. [15]

Watt offers only a quasi-theoretical reading of the subject of Islam and modernity. Although modernity is one of his key analytic concepts, he does not define it clearly, nor does he adequately portray the dynamics of Western hegemony over the Muslim world and their current consequences.

The author further maintains that the traditional Islamic outlook, which was formed in the early phase of Islam against the background of the Qur'an, hadith and consensus, is based on the following premises: (1) the unchangingness of the world, (2) the finality and superiority of Islam, and (3) the idealization of Muhammad as the perfect model that Muslims must follow.

In reconstructing the epistemological foundations of this outlook, Watt argues quite explicitly that there is no place in Muslim thinking for development, social and economic progress and advancement. He justifies the above view by saying that, "apart from the particular dangers inherent in the idealization of early Islam, there is a general danger, namely, that the community becomes so obsessed with recreating something past that it fails to see and deal with the real challenges and problems of the present." [16]

It is clear that Watt treats the complex and rich history of Islamic epistemology in a monolithic fashion. He is far less successful in his attempt at the reconstruction of the Islamic theory of knowledge than, let us say, both Fazlur Rahman [17] and Muhammad Arkoun, to whom he refers very often.

In treating 'religious revivalism,' Watt argues that Islamic resurgence has resulted from the 'ulama's desire to enhance their power and social prestige. [18] This thesis, to my mind, misrepresents the formation and growth of the modern Islamic movements, which should be understood, to a large extent, as a reaction to the Western colonization of the Muslim world. Although he declares that one of the great evils of the present day is "the unscrupulous exploitation of the Third World by Western multinational corporations," [19] he does not show how this exploitation has affected the formation of the whole process of Islamic resurgence.

Watt's effort to present a true picture of the conflict between Islam and modernity is highlighted by his failure to grasp the complex composition of Islamic epistemology and its successive transformations through the system of the Shari'ah. He argues, for instance, that the traditional Islamic image "is making it difficult for Muslims to adjust adequately to life at the end of the

twentieth century." [20] Isn't the role of theology in any religious system to constantly adapt its main presuppositions to the exigencies of the changing world?

In conclusion, Watt fails to integrate the historical reality of Western exploitation of the Muslim world into -coherent system of analysis. At times, his analysis takes a highly descriptive form which lacks a dynamic reflection on the process of modern history. Furthermore, as indicated above, Watt's approach incorporates in it the notion of the superiority of the Western culture over the Islamic one. It is time that Third World thinkers take a critical stand towards the legacy of the West, Westernization, and modernization in the Muslim world.

Notes:

[14]. William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

[15]. Mohammed Arkoun, *Essais sur la pensee islamique* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1984), especially chapter eight.

[16]. Watt, p. 22.

[17]. See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), and Akbar Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam* (London: Routledge Press, 1992).

[18]. Watt, p. 43.

[19]. *Ibid.*, p.102.

[20]. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

Chapter 4 : Third Study

Leonard Binder's *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* is the most sophisticated Western study of the relationship between Islam and society in the modern Arab

world to appear in the United States recently. Binder maintains that liberalism is not only rational, universal, and politically feasible, but it is the only alternative to the political and moral predicament of the Third World, especially the Muslim world.

Binder claims that his main goal behind writing a book on "Islamic liberalism" is to help Muslim intellectuals produce "a liberal Islamic discursive formation which poses a challenge to the existing scripturalist and fundamentalist alternatives." Modern Muslim theologians and thinkers are aware of the Straussian distinction between political philosophy and political theology.

According to Leo Strauss, [21] political theology is made up of those teachings that are based on divine revelation, whereas political philosophy is limited to what is accessible to the unassisted human mind. Western political philosophy rejects any divine intervention in the historical and political process.

Political philosophy, as advanced by Binder, is based on the notion that the best context for political action is that of a democracy. Therefore, according to this view, the main assumptions, trends, and manifestations of political philosophy are sustained by a democracy.

Binder contends that liberalism, as a political philosophy and Western ideological formation, is viable in the contemporary Muslim world, especially in the Middle East. He points out that "political liberalism can exist only where and when its social and intellectual prerequisites exist ... These preconditions already exist in the Middle East." [22] Political liberalism rests on the fundamental assumption of the state-religion separation. Although the latter has been a de facto reality in many Middle East societies, Muslim theorists of contemporary state and politics have not appropriated it yet.

It is clear that Binder does not question the inherent notions of superiority underlying modernization theories. He argues that modernization theory is only "an academic transfer of the dominant, and ideologically significant paradigm employed in research on the American political system."

Classical as well as contemporary American modernization theorists have only recently begun to take into account the importance of Islam as a cultural system and an ideological social phenomenon. For a long while, the only factors considered were education, urbanization, media exposure, and economic productivity.

As a result, modernization theorists, including Binder, have failed to present an adequate formulation of the relationship between Islam and society in the post-colonial phase. In one sense, Binder "atomizes" [23] Islam to such an extent where he holds the comfortable notion that "Islam in its various forms, and categories, and applications, is only a part of Middle East culture,

and by itself accounts for little." Such an inaccurate statement makes one doubt the coherence and vitality of a 'liberal project' in an Islamic context.

One of Binder's implicit assumptions is that Western liberalism has been a major cause behind the transition of the modern Arab world from "the closed society" to "the open society." Binder contends along the same lines of the famous "open society" theoretician, Karl Popper, [24] that the main characteristics of "closed society" are defined by its organic ties, tribal and collectivist mentality, lack of individuality, and religious rigidity.

The open (liberal) society, on the other hand, is marked by individuality, freedom of expression, rationalism, social mobility, and a critical appraisal of social reality. In other words, according to Binder, liberalism has assisted modern Arab society in maintaining a degree of tolerance and openness to outside influences. Furthermore, the transition from the "closed society" to the open one signals a total breakdown of tribalism and religious rigidity.

Then, to Binder's mind, any reaction against liberalism in the modern Arab World, either in the form of "Islamic fundamentalism" or anti-Western nationalism, is, in fact, a reaction against socio-economic progress, and the scientific culture of the Western civilization. One can, therefore, theorize that Binder's political project for the Muslim Middle East is superimposed from the outside since it fails to express the aspirations of Muslims as people.

Notes:

[21]. See Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[22]. Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.102.

[23]. In one of his major studies on modern Islam, Hamilton Gibb argues that the Arab-Islamic mind is atomistic. Consult, Hamilton Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), especially chapter one.

[24]. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, two volumes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

Chapter 5 : Fourth Study

Our fourth book is authored by the Canadian scholar Ronald Nettler. In *Past Trials and Present Tribulations*, [25] Nettler's objective is to portray the Islamic doctrinal dimension of Muslim-Jewish relations. He argues that Muslims have developed a sophisticated and rich doctrine of hatred towards Jews (including modern-day Israelis) since the foundation of the Islamic state during the Prophet's time in 622.

Undoubtedly, Nettler's assumptions are bounded by an interest, context, and subjectivity. It seems to me that his objective in essence is to justify the hegemonic and colonialist nature of the state of Israel. Since his context is that of Israeli scholarship, which is antagonistic to both Arabism and Islam, his personal interest would be to show that the real problem is not between Christendom/Europe and Judaism, but between Islam and Judaism.

Nettler does not draw any analytical distinction between Judaism, Zionism, and Israel. [26] He considers Zionism to be the product of Judaism and Israel the culmination of both. Understood in this light, if Muslims oppose the Israeli occupation of Palestine, they, then, oppose both Zionism and Judaism.

It is the contention of many specialists on Jewish history that Zionism and the Jewish Holocaust have to be understood against the socioeconomic, political, and nationalist-chauvinistic European background of the 19th and early 20th centuries. [27] The European persecution of Jews did not only culminate in the Holocaust but in the creation of Israel too. The writer is oblivious to this significant historical phenomenon, and, instead, considers the West to be the true liberator of the Jews when it supported the creation of the state of Israel.

It is clear that Nettler cannot see the anomalous consequences that the creation of Israel has brought upon Palestinian society, its total disintegration, and the dispersal of its people. What he discusses, instead, is the alleged "darker side of Jewish life under Islam, which redefined the erstwhile conception of Islamic 'toleration' as having been more problematic than could before have been imagined." [28] With no historical evidence in hand, the writer rushes to prove the "evil Muslim treatment of the Jews." [29]

Nettler aims at proving his thesis of "Muslim animosity to Jews" by treating some of the works of the leading Egyptian Muslim thinker, Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966). He uncritically accepts Wilfred Cantwell Smith's argument that "the modern period of Islamic history... begins with decadence within, intrusion and menace without;

and the worldly glory that reputedly went with obedience to God's law only a distant memory of

happier days."³⁰ He argues, in an absolute manner, that the West has nothing to do, directly or indirectly, with the "decline" of Islam in the modern world. Yet, Modern Islam, in the writer's view, suffers from a fundamental malaise. The only justifiable explanation, then, has to be sought within the Islamic religion.

Nettler proposes that the leaders of modern Islamic resurgence, and in particular Sayyid Qutb, propagated an "emotional hatred which [is] uniquely modern as part of Muslim thinking on the Jews." [31] To him, this supposed Muslim hatred is a metaphysical a priori; it is fixed, absolute, and unchanging, and beyond the rules of history. Nettler does not treat Qutb's ideas in their totality as a comprehensive dynamic. Instead, he singles out one dimension of his thought: his stand on Zionism and the State of Israel. [32]

To better understand Qutb's ideas, one has to relate them to the influence of foreign powers on the leading Egyptian intelligentsia of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. Early in his professional career as a man of letters in the late thirties, Qutb wrote a number of articles on colonialism and Westernization. He linked these two phenomena to the British attempt to create a state for the Jews in Palestine.

Nettler does not refer to these significant phases in the history of the Middle East: colonialism and the creation of Israel. He treats the Qutbian "doctrine of hatred towards the Jews" in an absolute political, and historical vacuum.

Qutb's philosophy, which is succinctly summarized in his main works, *Social Justice in Islam*, [33] and *Islam and the Battle between Islam and Capitalism*, [34] placed him at the center of Egyptian intellectual life during that period. He was never a neutral interpreter of events, but an involved theologian, philosopher, and social thinker. His social commitments equalled his political and theological concerns.

It was quite natural for him, therefore, to respond, analytically at least, to one of the main dangers that the Muslim world was facing: Western colonization and its culmination in the creation of the state of Israel. [35] Qutb's theoretical formulations were very much shaped by those practical concerns.

Notes:

[25]. Ronald L. Nettler, *Past Trials and Present Tribulations: A Muslim Fundamentalist's View of the Jews* (Published for the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism, New York: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem by Pergamon Press, 1987).

[26]. One of the best books on the subject is Benjamin Bei-Hallahmi, *Original Sins: Reflections on*

the History of Zionism and Israel (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1993), especially chapter four.

[27]. In this regard see the following. Marc H. Ellis, *Ending Auschwitz: The Future of Jewish and Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994); Marc H. Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation* (Markynoll: Orbis Books, 1988); Marc H. Ellis, *Beyond Innocence and Redemption: Confronting the Holocaust and Israeli Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), and Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Islam and the Problem of Israel* (Islamic Council of Europe, 1990).

[28]. Nettler, p. ix.

[29]. Many Israeli writers nowadays are propagating this theme. In this regard see the following major article of the Israeli scholar, Hanna Rahman, "The Conflict Between the Prophet and the Opposition in Madina," *Der Islam*, Vol. 62 (2), 1985, pp. 260-297.

[30]. See. W. C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962? p.16.

[31]. Nettler, p. 51.

[32]. For a comprehensive analysis of Sayyid Qutb's ideas on imperialism and Israel, consult the author's study: *The Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World*, to be published by State University of New York Press.

[33]. See Sayyid Qutb, *al-'Adalah al-ijtima iyyah fi al-Islam* (Cairo, 1948). English Translation by J. Hardy, *Social Justice in Islam* (Washington, D. C, 1952).

[34]. Sayyid Qutb, *al-Ma'rakah bayn al-Islam wa al-ra'smaliyyah* (Cairo, 1952).

[35]. For an elaboration on this theme see John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Chapter 6 : Europe and the Study of Islamism

It is important at this juncture to stress that a number of well researched studies, done mainly in Europe, treat the subject of Islamism in its cultural and theological, and not only political, dimensions. One study is that of Olivie Carre's, *Mystique et politique: lector revolutionnaire du*

Coran par Sayyid Qutb, frere musulmane radical, [36] which is an indispensable contribution to our understanding of the Qur'anic principles and contents of, what has been termed, the Qutbian discourse (the thought-structure of Sayyid Qutb).

Carre, who bases his study on a thorough analysis of the principal themes of Sayyid Qutb's major exegesis, *Fi zilal al-Qur'an*, [37] adopts a comparative method of analysis. He, for instance, keeps referring to the major exegesis by the Syrian Rashid Rida, [38] *Tafsir al-manar*, and its impact, in terms of method and terminology, on Qutbian tafsir.

The main difference between Rida's tafsir and Qutb's *Zilal* is that Rida presented a traditional Qur'anic commentary which was in line with traditional Islamic exegesis, whereas Qutb, who came from a secular background of learning, did not follow in the footsteps of traditional exegesis. This is the case mainly because Qutb was more effective than Rida in relating the Qur'anic reality [*al-haqiqah al qur'aniyyah*] [39] to the modern exigencies of life.

Qutb's main goal, as Carre shows throughout his study, is to free the Qur'anic text from the obscurantism and scholasticism of the 'ulama' who emphasize the doctrinal at the expense of the social, and the ethical at the expense of the political. Qutb's interpretation is based primarily on (1) philological understanding; (2) the primary social and political context of the verses (circumstances of the revelation); (3) and the present meaning that can be derived from the above. As sums, his theoretical reflections gain a new significance; far from restricting himself to philology and past meaning, he is concerned about the relevance of the Qur'anic text to the present.

Carre explains correctly that Qutb's method rests on a number of interdependent principles: theology, philosophy, sociology, politics, and hermeneutics. Experience also plays a significant part in his methodological construct. Therefore, the expressions Qutb relates should be understood as part of a whole stream of consciousness emanating from the historical experience of a religious figure in a highly diversified intellectual context.

Hence Qutb's formula of Qur'anic knowledge is understanding through experience and reflection. We witness the intersection of the personal and the epistemological from his early work, and thus we can not easily escape the methodological problematic as construed by Qutb. He was not objective; neither was he subjective. He was pragmatic and idealistic at the same time. His justification was marred by speculative idealism and social pragmatism.

We are here concerned with the theological, social, cultural, and ideological formulations of Sayyid Qutb as they appear in the *Zilal*. We believe that these formulations are culmination of his mature intellectual effort that began before his joining the Muslim Brotherhood in 1952. Therefore, Qutb's pre-*Zilal* ideas bear a direct relevance to what we are trying to study in the *Zilal*.

That is to say, Qutb's oeuvre has to be considered in its totality before any sound judgement on the value of this work could be made.

What we have in mind are two significant goals: (1) to study Qutb's Qur'anic weltanschauung; i.e., the ontology of his thought, and (2) to discuss his basic concepts in relation to the larger issues and problems that have preoccupied modern Arabic/Islamic thought, such as, revival, westernization, tradition, the role of the intelligentsia, sacred and profane theories of knowledge, and the place of religion in general in the modern world.

Carre proceeds in his discussion to argue that, "The author, Sayyid Qutb, does not interest us himself. But some elements of his life are uniquely utilized in order to comprehend certain fragments of discourse that make up the Zilal." [40] The Zilal has furnished the theoretical framework of thinking and behaviour for Islamic movements, not only in Egypt, but throughout the Arab World, and in some other Muslim countries as well. In many passages in the Zilal, Qutb owes to the thought of two major Indian Muslim thinkers, Nadwi and Mawdudi.

Carre attempts to lay down the principal themes of Zilal: (1) questions of Qutbian method and discourse; (2) the normative foundations of Islamic society; (3) the political form of ideal Islamic state; (4) questions of peace and war; (5) Jahiliyyah vs. Islam; (6) the People of the Book, especially Jews and Christians; (7) proper Islamic economic system and social structure; (8) family structure and role of women in society. Thus one can see that the themes of the Zilal revolve around doctrinal, philosophical, and social issues and questions.

[36]. Olivie Carre, *Mystique et politique: lectur revolutionnaire du Coran par Sayyid Qutb, frere musulman radical* (Paris: Editions du Cherf,1984).

[37]. Sayyid Qutb, *Fi zilal al-Qur'an* ('In the Shade of the Qur'an') (Beirut, 1974).

[38]. Rida was born in what is called today Lebanon. He died in 1937 in Egypt after becoming one of the most influential disciples of Shaykh Muhammad `Abduh (d. 1905). See Albert Hourani's excellent analysis of part of Rida's life: Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). A recent important book is: Emad Eldin Shahin, *Through Muslim Eyes: M. Rashid Rida and the West* (Herndon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993), especially chapter one.

Notes:

[39]. On the elaboration of this term, see Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (London, Islamic Texts Society, 1993), and his *Symbol and Archetype: A Study of the Meaning of Existence* (London: Quinta Essentia,1991).

[40]. Carre, p.19.

Chapter 7 : Modern Islamic Discourse: Themes and Arguments

Based on the above theoretical consideration, I would like to investigate, albeit briefly, the main themes and arguments of the modern Islamic discourse, especially that of resurgence. The following are some of the underlying presuppositions and claims of this method: (1) First, since the emergence of Islam, the interpretation provided by various scholars of this religious phenomenon has given rise to different discourses.

Furthermore, within the Arabic language, the words used and the meanings of the words used differ from one discourse to another. (2) Second, these discourses have been conditioned by the concepts, mental formations, economic conditions, and political attitudes of their particular historical situation.

Therefore, in rendering a judgement on somebody's work, one has to pose questions about the historical conditions in which that discourse was produced. (3) Third, one has to study the different Islamic discourses of modern Islam in relation to the West. (4) The West as a conceptual category should be historically and philosophically defined. (5) This comprehensive method proposed should elaborate on the possible connection between ideology and discourse. [41]

What is, therefore, the relationship between modern Islam and the West? Somebody may object to this formulation: how can we equate a theological construct with a purely political or geographic construct? The initial stage of this inquiry, however, is a matter of definition. What is the West? What is Islam?

What is the West? In dealing with the modern West, we are to discuss five salient movements: (1) Renaissance, (2) Reformation, (3) Industrialization, (4) Enlightenment, and (5) post-Enlightenment. I want to stress here that these movements are in essence philosophical movements. The philosophical underpinnings of the Renaissance were: rationalism, humanism, secularization. The Reformation led to the resurgence of individuality and the annihilation of the communal Christian spirit.

What is Islam? It is impossible, of course, to give a precise linguistic meaning to the term Islam.

For analytical purposes, one could talk of this universal religious phenomenon in the following terms: (1) Islam as metaphysics; (2) Islam as civilization (it means different things to different people); (3) Islam as the "other."

I would venture to argue that the history of the modern Muslim people has been highly intertwined with that of the West. And, therefore, modern Islam cannot be understood except in relation to the modern West and all the movements that constituted this modern West, be they philosophical, cultural, economic, political, and military.

We can delineate three moments or phases in the interaction between modern Islam and the West: (1) the first is the military conquest of Muslim lands by Western powers. Muslims were weak militarily and politically. Their only response was to seek refuge in Islam as the source of their strength.

(2) The second phase witnesses the translation of European hegemony into a cultural and religious system. This phase is distinguished by the building of Western educational, cultural, and legal institutions that begin to replace the traditional Islamic ones. This is the phase of westernization. The third phase is that of post-colonialism, one distinguishing feature of which is the rise of both nationalism and religious revivalism.

What are the main premises of "resurgent Islam?" The following are some basic characteristics.

(1) Islamic resurgence has emphasized the role of reason in Muslim legal theory, and called for a renaissance of Islam in the modern world on the basis of a reactivation of *ijtihad* in the religious and legal sciences. The Muslims can achieve the ideals of Islam as a religion, as a *Shari'ah* and as a state, by opening the door of *ijtihad*. Furthermore, the neglect of *ijtihad* led some Muslims to become ignorant of Islam, and others to be attached to westernization and atheism.

(2) Second, Islamic revivalism has called for the reconstruction of the notion of authority, of the Islamic nation, which is a gradual "reconstitution of the Muslim Ummah," and the building of a comprehensive system of Islamic law, government, education, and ethics in the modern world. The reconstitution of the Ummah in the modern world was possible, if there were "a return" to the original sources of Islam.

(3) Third, it has called for the reconstruction of the sources of knowledge. The Qur'an and the Sunnah were the only sources recognized. The moral, doctrinal, and linguistic superiority of the "grand ancestors" or the Companions of the Prophet furnished the sole criterion according to which new ethical and social rules would be judged. Therefore, Islamic theory of life is characterized by simplicity and doctrinal unity. Many came to define religious reform as a triple unification of doctrine, law, and ethics.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna [42] Al-Banna, who was greatly influenced by Rida, acted as a caliph in exile, as the supreme mujtahid in the community, as a political and spiritual leader and the interpreter par excellence of the rules of the Shari'ah.

From its inception, the Ikhwan movement aimed at finding "Islamic solutions" to the problems of education, economic organization, and social justice in society. It advocated an Islamic nation without separation of religion and state. Next, it proposed an Islamic educational system whose goal was to create the "Muslim individual, the Muslim house, the Muslim nation, and the Muslim government." Third, it created an economic infrastructure based on Islamic principles to solve social injustice.

In the midst of this heritage weighty with consequences, the mission of the Ikhwan was (1) to free the Islamic fatherland from all foreign domination, and (2) to help a free Islamic state arise in the Islamic fatherland. Al-Banna considered it the duty of each Muslim to help build such a state, "for as long as this state does not emerge, the Muslims in their totality are committing sin." In addition, they should work to reform the education system, wage war against poverty, ignorance, disease, and crime, and create an exemplary society which would deserve to be associated with the Islamic sacred law.

In conclusion, the above discussion has raised a number of questions that still await an answer. One way of passing sound judgement on the nature, growth, and current dispensation of Islamic resurgence is to study the theological and cultural underpinning of this phenomenon in addition to its political impact.

Notes:

[41]. An extensive analysis of these notions is to be found in: Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi`, "Reflections on the Islamic Renaissance in the Modern Arab World: Some Methodological Questions," *Islamic Culture*, Vol. LXIII (3), July 1989, pp. 42-59, and his "Secularization, Islam and the Future of the Arab World: A Derivative Discourse," *Peuples Mediterraneens*, Issue Number 60 (July-September 1992), pp.177741.

[42]. On Hasan al-Banna see, Ishak Musal al-Hussaini, *The Moslem Brethren: The Greatest of Modern Islamic Movements* (Beirut: Khayat's College Book Cooperative, 1956); Charles Wendell, *Five Tracts of Hasan al-Banna* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Sa id Hawwa, *al-Madkhal ila Da'wat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin* (Amman, 1979); Ibrahim Ghanim, *al-Fikr al-siyasi li al-Imam Hasan al-Banna* (Cairo, 1992), and Rifa't al-Said, *Hasan al-Banna: kayfa wa limadha?* (Cairo, 1984).

