

Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri

Towards a Renewal of Islamic Thought

Publications of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
-ISESCO- 1440H / 2019



Table of contents

❖ Preface.....	7
❖ On the Concept of Renewal	11
❖ Renewal is Not an Antithesis of the Perfection and Steadiness of Religion	13
❖ On the Concept of <i>Ijtihad</i>	14
❖ On the Concept of Modernism and Modernization ...	18
❖ Modern <i>Ijtihad</i> and the Renewal of Islamic Thought ...	22
❖ Toward a Revival of Modern Islamic Thought	24
❖ Sheikh Mohamed Ibn Abdelwahab and Sheikh Mohamed al-Shawkani: Pioneering Revivers	25
❖ The Spirit of Renewal in Sheikh Mohamed Abdu's and Sheikh al-Jisr's Works	26
❖ Modern Islamic Thought Currents	27
❖ Jurisprudence of Middle Stance and Renovation	30
❖ Renewing Muslim Political Thought	32
❖ Reconstruction in Mohamed Iqbal's Works	33
❖ References and bibliography	35

Preface

The renewal of the Islamic thought is an issue that has attracted a lot of attention, on more than one level, from great many Islamic thought scholars and researchers, which gives a strong indication of the intellectual vitality of pro-Islamic world reform scholars, theologians and intellectuals.

Renewal is especially important in that it will enable Muslim community's transition from weakness to strength, which cannot be made without a thorough understanding of the overriding goals of the Islamic law and a deep appreciation of the changes and development requirements of today's world. Indeed, it is an empowering force for Muslims to move away from a position of dependence to one of independence in all areas of judicial, intellectual, linguistic and cultural activity.

As well as being an effective conduit for the modernization of Muslim community's public life, Islamic thought's renewal is the best tool for a quantum-phase transition to improve thinking patterns, reassess the present situation, push forth reform agendas and build up a forward-looking vision. Far from being a mechanical activity simply because it is governed by strictly defined rules, the renewal of Islamic thought rejects codification and imposition. Rather, it is an ongoing process that is responsive to the ever-changing evolution and innovation of societies, and in continuous interaction with the complex maze of mutations over time. Also, the process is flexible; it is not limited to a particular area, but evolves in ascending order from one historical era to another without ever deviating from its foundational principles.

It nevertheless stands to reason that not all renewal is positive, and not all development is progressive. Renewal can be negative, and development may be the opposite of progress. It is therefore necessary to take account, from an Islamic perspective, of the jurisprudential rules underlying renewal, which should not be imposed, as some may wrongly understand, nor considered a restraint on the human intellect or a hindrance to human's ability to be creative and think independently.

Certainly, there are governing rules for renewal which define its overriding goals. Since the focus here is the renewal of Islamic thought in its broadest scope, it only makes sense to stress that the objective is to make the most of renewal as a conduit for the Muslim Ummah's overall development. However, this cannot be achieved unless building on the firm foundations and ultimate goals of the Islamic law, which are particularly in perfect harmony with life's requirements for the full enjoyment of humans' legitimate rights, namely freedom, dignity, social justice, mental uplifting, economic development, and all-embracing security and peace.

So in view of the crucial nature of this topic, the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies invited me to give a lecture at their building on 22 October 2013. In my lecture themed "**Towards a Renewal of Islamic Thought**", I discussed from different angles a set of intertwined issues related to this core question, pointing out that renewal is not an antithesis of the perfection and steadiness of religion. It is, I explained, the ideal way to further extend the influence of religion with respect to new focus-areas, while ensuring the integrity of its bedrock foundations. I concluded that the renewal of Islamic thought is about the renewal of human thought in general and, by extension, the renewal, modernization and advancement of positions, human practice, and human life.

If thinking is an Islamic obligation, Ijtihad (independent reasoning) is a life necessity in the same manner as renewal; all the more so as they both (renewal and Ijtihad) blend and interweave with one another. I particularly wanted to get the point across to the intellectual elite in attendance that Islam is a religion of life, and that it considers coping with life's twists and turns as both a religious obligation and a life necessity. The point in my lecture was also to warn that unless Muslims bring renewal, they will risk stagnating and miss a vital opportunity to press ahead with integrated development, in accordance with the immutable principles of Islam and the whole spectrum of life's continuous mutations.

The objective of my paper was also to explain that the renewal of Islamic thought is not limited to a single aspect of life, but more broadly covers Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic political thought, administrative systems in Islamic countries, the Islamic economic system, as well as individual and community life. This holistic notion of renewal is what is truly meant by renewing modern Islamic thought.

In order to benefit the general public and stimulate scholars, jurists and intellectuals to look further into this vital topic, I published this lecture in three languages (Arabic, English and French) in a single edition.

Allah we ask to show us the right path.

Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri

Director General of
the Islamic Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization -ISESCO-

On the Concept of Renewal

In the general sense, Renewal is turning something old new, reactivating the state of newness, or endeavoring to prolong the state of newness. In Arabic, the term ‘Tajdid’ is derived from the verb ‘*Jadda*’ meaning something that becomes new or is returned to a state of newness. It may also refer to preserving what is new in this state of newness.

The word ‘**New**’ is mentioned eight times in the Holy Quran, and came with three meanings which are **Resurrection**, **Revival** and **Restoration** - mostly in relation to creation and rebirth. The *hadith* says: “*God sends to the Ummah every 100 years someone [or some people] who would renew the religion again.*”⁽¹⁾ Scholars understood the following from this noble *hadith*:

- **Renewal of religion:** i.e. reviving and reforming the relationship Muslims entertain with their religion and not the religion itself since God (SWT) has perfected His religion.
- **The timeframe of renewal:** meaning the continuation of renewal without interruption, renewal being an ongoing process with interconnected episodes.

(1) Narrated by Abu Dawood in **al-Malahim** (512), and by al-Hakim in **al-Fitan wa al-Malahim** (576/4), and also by al-Tabarani in **al-Awsat** (522/4) on the authority of Abu Huraira.

- **The renovator:** i.e. the human element who engages in the act of renewal. This role-player may be an individual or a group, a fiqh academy, a research center or a center of studies.

Dr Yusuf Al-Qaradawi maintains that the pronoun “**who**” in the above-quoted hadith is both singular and plural. Some scholars even believe that a ‘renovator’ may refer to more than one individual or a group of individuals.

In this light, renewal represents a refutation of static Imitation that rejects any change despite the passage of time and the changes of space, and that heeds not the developments and changes that arise. Imitation is thus the antithesis of *ijtihad* in all senses of the word, for **ijtihad is renewal and imitation is the opposite of renewal.**

This last point is critical in its importance since Muslims believe that renewal goes through the process of *ijtihad* and there can be no renewal without *ijtihad*. Engaging in *ijtihad* confers on one the attribute of innovator or renewer, and by engaging in renewal one accedes, in one way or the other, to the status of a *mujtahid*. Therefore, linking renewal to *ijtihad* that is reasonably accepted and does not contradict the absolute truth of religion, and as long as Islam urges us to apply our minds, ponder the universe and use reason to understand and weigh all matters, is a call to continuous renewal. **Reason can be a force of renewal if we give free rein to its faculties, and thus renewal becomes one of many processes of the wise and pondering mind, and one of life’s necessities.**

Renewal will only be relevant and acceptable if it is governed by the laws of religion and reason at the same time. Religion cannot

be renewed, what can be renewed is people's understanding of this religion, their lives, and their interpretation and understanding of the precepts of the Sharia. And huge is the chasm between religious texts as they were revealed by God (SWT) and how man understands them and the way he approaches them. The bane of straying from the path of righteousness is the result of a flaw or a perversion of faith, of radicalism in religious practice and worship, or of fanaticism in actions and conduct.

Given the complex nature of the areas in need of renewal, the connotations of the renewal concept vary from one scholar to another. In a paper entitled "Insights into Modern Calls to Renew Fiqh", Dr Mohamed Kettani says that this makes the concept quite vague, due to the diverging approaches to the reality to be changed and renewed and to the heritage to be revitalized. Yet, the concept of renewing belief differs from that of renewing *fiqh*, and both of them differ from the one which concerns the reformation thought in general.

Renewal is Not an Antithesis of the Perfection and steadiness of Religion

Renewal is not an antithesis of the **perfection and steadiness of religion** but is the means by which the perfect religion's influence extends to cover new fields and developments, and the only guarantee for the fundamentals to remain suitable for all times and all places, a guarantee that the seal message survives to eternity as God decreed. Were it not for the new branches that **renewal** is extending to all things new, the thread it is weaving between the enduring fundamentals and the novelties thrown at us by development, and were it not for this constant renewal which reveals the true face and

pure essence of religion's fundamentals and immutable constants, were it not for the part played by **renewal** in Islam's life and march, these fundamentals would have been abrogated and obliterated either when life's progress overtakes and overshadows the older offshoots, in the process causing the new extension to lose the sheltering shade of Islam, or through a distortion of the essence of these fundamentals by an amassment of heretic novelties.

In brief, *ijtihad* is a renewal of thought, of stance, of practice and of life in general. Renewal is also an endeavor to understand religion, infer solutions from the gist of the Islamic Sharia for the problems faced by the Muslim community, in light of the unfolding developments within the society and awareness of the mutations undergone by today's world.

Renewal is a means towards the continuity -i.e. affirmation- of the perfect religion, and not a negation of its inveterate nature and perfection.

Can we then say that renewal is close in concept to modernism, or is the path to modernism?

Let us look at modernism first.

What is the relationship between renewal, *ijtihad* and modernism?

Is renewal a form of *ijtihad* in thought, in legislation and in inferring solutions to the problems at hand and the crises that emerge only to drown Muslim societies?

On the Concept of *Ijtihad*

A methodical approach requires that we stop at each of these three concepts. Now that we have established what renewal stands for,

let us look at *ijtihad* to gain a better understanding of the renewal connotation it carries.

Linguistically, the origin of *ijtihad* is the verb **ijtahada**, meaning the utmost effort an individual can put forth in an activity. As a term, it refers to the endeavor by a scholar to derive a rule on a given incident through evidence and legal means. It involves careful consideration and great endeavor to find solutions to the problems created by the fast-paced changes experienced by individuals and societies, the aim being to make their lives easier, manage their affairs and improve their living conditions.

In as much as thinking is an Islamic duty, *ijtihad* is one of life's necessities, standing on equal footing with renewal. Life cannot aspire to righteousness in a society that gives in to stagnation, and Muslim society can only advance through *ijtihad* and ceaseless renewal, conducted in the full respect of Islam's precepts and rules and within a framework of Islam's principles, values and teachings.

And since *ijtihad* is a sine qua non condition for the advancement of Muslim societies to higher levels of life befitting human dignity, then the edifying *ijtihad* that enriches human life and broadens the horizons of development, growth and advancement should be governed by Sharia, reason and interests-based rules and regulations, otherwise it would be stripped of all meaning.

If we peruse the sources of Islamic fiqh heritage, we will find that fundamentalist scholars defined *ijtihad* as the utmost endeavor of a scholar to reach a speculative legal opinion and wherein he feels he had exhausted all possible avenues.

Ibn Hazm defined *ijtihad* as “*the utmost effort put forth in judging a given incident where a rule on that incident already exists since all*

Sharia rules have been fully addressed and clarified by God (SWT) and are available for reference to all scholars. And while these rules may not be within the grasp of some people, their total inaccessibility to all is impossible since God (SWT) only entrusts us with that which we can humanly bear. If a rule is entirely out of the grasp of each and everyone, then God did not command us to grasp it.” These two fundamental definitions provide us with enough clarity on the *fiqh* connotation of *ijtihad*, establishing the general notion of *ijtihad*.

Furthermore, there are two categories of *ijtihad*. One is absolute *ijtihad* which uses all existent sources in inferring few rules with the help of clear-cut rules or quoting the sources the *mujtahid* has access to. The other form of *ijtihad* pertains to inferring some rules on a specific case about which no rulings exist. In the latter case, the *mujtahid* is required to have full knowledge of all matters related to that specific rule, including certainty that his diligence does not contradict an existing text or a consensus-based rule. But knowledge of all rulings is not a must.

Fundamentalist scholars also see that every legal rule that has no clear-cut rules to support it is open to *ijtihad*, and therefore no *ijtihad* shall be accepted on matters about which clear-cut rules already exist such as the duty of praying five times, of giving *zakat* and other pillars of Islam. The gates of renewing *ijtihad* or of *ijtihad*-based renewal are thus opened before the scholars and experts with the required capacities, knowledge and proper understanding of the Sharia precepts and of today’s challenges.

Ijtihad is either applied within the context of a source text, which includes *ijtihad* in knowing the general rules that provide global evidence, or through pondering, which involves *Qiyas* (analogy) by

the *mujtahid* of a matter where there is no explicit text or consensus with one about which a text or consensus exist. It also involves inferring a legal opinion from the general rules of Islamic Sharia, which is called by some jurists as discretionary opinion-based and is the same as opinion-based renewal.

What comes to attention when pondering at length the major reference *fiqh* books that addressed *ijtihad* is that they did not confine it to *fiqh* in the narrow sense it has come to convey in recent times. In fact, the Arabic word '*fiqh*' means understanding or grasping, and Islamic *fiqh* is precisely the science of understanding the rule of Islamic Sharia, and the *ijtihad* of a scholar (*faqeeh*) is his utmost endeavor to reach a presumptive opinion on a legal rule, and therefore *ijtihad* in *fiqh* is simply the endeavor to reach a goal through reasoning.

The Egyptian scholar Sheikh Abdelwahab Khallaf contended that the backbone of a *mujtahid*'s work is understanding the general principles and spirit of legislation embedded by the Lawgiver in His various decrees and over which legislation was founded. This legislative spirit and these guiding principles are not limited to a specific legal field. This profound and rational understanding, which encompasses all aspects of an issue, or 'case' to use *fiqh* terminology, is the gateway to solving the problems affecting people in every age.

And since the rules of Sharia are comprehensive, profound, broad and encompass all aspects of human life, Islamic *fiqh* becomes in essence the *fiqh* of life, true to the Islamic vision of man, life and the universe. It is legally and logically impossible to confine *fiqh* within one part of our noble Sharia and therefore limit the scholar's

scope of action. As it is evident, ordained and agreed upon, the Sharia is all-inclusive, suitable for all times and places, and so is renewal which, after all, is a form of *ijtihad*.

We need to clarify here that linguistically speaking *fiqh* is the profound and insightful understanding of the goals behind words and deeds. For jurists, the meaning of *fiqh* does not expand beyond this although its generalities may be subjected to specificity. It is the knowledge of practical legal rulings through their detailed rules. In order to properly understand the goals of *ijtihad* and fathom the link between it and renewal, we must define the concept of the science of *fiqh* which falls in two parts:

- One is knowledge of practical legal rulings. Dogma rules such as monotheism, the messages conveyed by prophets and the latter's deliverance of God's messages, knowledge of the Day of Reckoning and such beliefs do not fall within the scope of the term '*fiqh*'.
- The second one is knowledge of the detailed clear-cut texts of every case.

Fiqh, in legal terminology, is therefore knowledge of the Sharia's practical rules, acquired from its detailed texts, or the sum of the Sharia's practical rules gleaned from their detailed detailed texts.

On the Concept of Modernism and Modernization

This is how we see renewal and *ijtihad*, interconnected and complementary of each other. As for modernism, often wrongfully associated with the concept of renewal, it is not a clear or accurate

concept. Generally speaking and according to the definitions put forth by many western thinkers, it is a clean rupture from the past and from an entire religious and cultural legacy. Another definition, applied in the artistic and philosophical fields, evokes the severing of all ties with the past and the search for new forms of expression. Modernism is also a trend in theology seeking to adapt traditional religious teachings to modern thought by invalidating their metaphysical dimensions.

Researchers wonder: did renewal and *ijtihad* serve as a means to modernism and modernization?

Let us put on record here that modernism has many schools and concepts. There is not one single concept of modernism nor is this concept cast in stone.

We will start by saying that modernism is a Western concept that took root in a Western environment and, as French thinker Alain Touraine says, modernism replaces God with science as society's pivot, and limits religious beliefs to the confines of the individual's private life.

The French Universalis Encyclopaedia explains that as a concept, modernism is neither social, nor political or historical but is more of a distinct civilizational mode in contrast with that of imitation. It is not static and therefore cannot be similar to imitation.

Modernism is not only the use of reason, science and technology. It is the use of reason, science and technology stripped of all value or value-free. This dimension is quite important in the structure of Western modernism. A value-free world is one that is also dissociated from human being, a world of material consequence

where the human being is subjected to the law of the matter, hence everything becomes relative and it becomes impossible to distinguish between good and evil, justice and injustice, between what is essential and what is relative, and finally between the human being and nature and the human being and matter. In the absence of absolute values to serve as benchmarks, the individual or the community become their own reference, and what they see as in their interest becomes well and good, and what is not in their interest becomes bad and evil. **Western modernism has made the human being the pivot of the universe.**

Emile Poulat, a prominent contemporary French researcher in the sociology of religion, considered that the West's enlightenment philosophy which served as a foundation for Western modernism represented a paradigm shift in the West's Christian heritage. He goes on to say: "*This ideology - enlightenment - is the mother. Everything that flows from it is the fruit of its developments and contradictions, without negating the epistemological rupture that divides two eras of human intellect: the era of the *summa theologiae* of Thomas d'Aquin, and the encyclopedic age of enlightenment philosophers. Henceforth, faith in the Kingdom of the Lord began to retreat before the advent and domination of the age of reason, and thus, the system of divine blessing began to disintegrate before the system of nature.*"

The Larousse Great Encyclopedia (1975 edition) defines modernism as "the plethora of intellectual schools and trends related to the renewal of theology, interpretation and the social system, and conversion of the church to adapt it to the needs of the times. In more specific terms, it refers to the religious crisis that shook the early years of the rule of Pope Pius X. The crisis of modernism was largely the result of the violent clash between the traditional

theological teachings and the novel religious sciences that took body far from fundamentalist censorship.

And since modernism is as it is, then we should exercise caution, examine the issue from different angles and avoid espousing modernism in its entirety and with its flaws, the reason being the close link thought to exist between renewal and modernism, which lacks sound grounds.

Two questions need to be addressed here:

- Do we mean by renewal modernism in the Western sense?
- Is there a link between modernism and *ijtihad* and today's renewal of the Islamic thought?

I saw fit to raise these two questions in order to define the exact meanings of these terms and address the issue at hand properly by giving it the share of research and analysis it deserves.

Surely what is meant by modernism here is not the Western concept of modernism, but the renewal of thought, and even the renewal of life on the basis of a modern system that regulates the life of human communities within a modern state, social organization and management of state affairs in accordance with predefined terms and fixed criteria. Strict adherence to these rules and terms leads to the fulfillment of progress and a life of dignity, safety and prosperity for individuals and groups.

These meanings and connotations are the objectives of Islam and the aims pursued by *ijtihad* and renewal under the Islamic perspective. *Ijtihad* is ever renewing life, new blood injected in the veins of the Islamic society. *Ijtihad* can at no cost stray far from the true path of religion, under no circumstances whatsoever, and in response to no pressures, no matter how well motivated they are.

It would thus be unwise to espouse Western modernism in all aspects. Wisdom dictates that we take only what is suitable and beneficial for us, or at least that of which the benefit outweighs the harm.

Modern *Ijtihad* and the Renewal of Islamic Thought

The purpose of contemporary *ijtihad* and renewal of Islamic thought is not to be modernists in the Western sense of the word. Our renewal and *ijtihad* are meant to make us modernists who keep pace with developments and draw benefit from today's advantages - but always within the framework of our own religious, cultural and civilizational specificities. Our renewal keeps us in a state of constant evolution and in perpetual anticipation of progress.

Modern Muslim thinkers have realized the ever regenerating need of our societies for *ijtihad*, modernization and renewal, and the importance of always giving due consideration to the priorities of *ijtihad*. *Ijtihad* takes many forms and affects many fields: *ijtihad* in *fiqh*, in politics, in economy, in technology, in science, in culture and in civilization. The same applies to renewal. There is the renewal of Islamic *fiqh*, of Islamic thought, of the Arabic language -which is the medium of thought-, of arts and literature, and many other forms of renewal and *ijtihad*, each affecting a field as diversified as the issues that require this renewal and *ijtihad*. In all these cases, ***ijtihad* is synonymous with renewal** and therefore the movement of *ijtihad* in all these fields should continue and closely interact with that of renewal within the context of an exact, well adapted and rational vision of the Sharia objectives and the wellbeing and prosperity of people.

Respecting these categorizations of *ijtihad* is part of the *fiqh* of priorities, although it does not mean in the least favoring *ijtihad* in a given field over *ijtihad* in another field. *Ijtihad* should be global and comprehensive with due consideration given to tackling priorities as per their degree of importance.

Thus we come to realize the importance of *ijtihad* in Islam and its link to renewal and modernization. It is in essence a renewal of religious matters in the sense of understanding the grand purpose of religion and the aims of the Sharia, implementing its precepts and being guided by its teachings, modernizing life, building civilization on earth, and reforming mankind.

This is the deep, exact and global meaning of renewal of which took cognizance early Muslim thinkers who laid down the foundations of an intellectual renaissance in the Muslim world which provided impetus for the liberation of Muslim lands from colonialism.

Having analyzed the three concepts of *ijtihad*, **renewal** and **modernization** and other inherent issues, we can say that the Islamic perspective of reality springs from a conscious assimilation of the objectives of the Sharia, religious principles and cultural and civilizational values, and from deep awareness of life's necessities, and of the challenges and dangers facing Muslims. Guided by the established principles and universal rules of our religion, and by an in-depth knowledge of our reality, and keeping pace with our time, we move towards the future, combining *ijtihad* and renewal as means to modernization and renewal. Such modernization and renewal are meant to ensure that we remain at pace with the time and its developments without undermining our religious constants and cultural and civilizational specificities, or relinquishing the supreme interests of our Ummah which represent the sum of the national interests of each country in the Muslim world.

Toward a Revival of Modern Islamic Thought

We thus call for the revival of modern Islamic thought with a sound vision of the mission of renewal. We also call for strengthening Islamic solidarity and boosting joint Islamic action so that the *ijtihad* of our Ummah becomes an ever renewing collective *ijtihad*, the fruit of the combined efforts of its scientists, scholars and experts to renew its life within a framework of cooperation, complementarity and coordination and modernize it in full respect of religion's constants and of the fundamentals of the munificent Islamic civilization.

Our anticipation of the future and our preparation for it would rest on solid foundations. In turn, our endeavors for the reform of the overall state and affairs would become a coordinated and cohesive effort with guaranteed results for the benefit of the Ummah at present and in the future.

Ijtihad in planning the future of the Muslim world, through a renewed Islamic thought that contributes to accomplishing this mission and shaping the ways to develop Islamic life, and modernizing the means and ways of fulfilling the lofty ideals we all pursue, are all channels that will possibly open wide horizons before us for serious and constructive work. They would help us at the same time to avoid pitfalls, keep us out of harms way and save us from the pressures to which are subjected enfeebled nations.

From this vision of the mission, meaning and limitations of renewal, and of the role, tools and conditions of *ijtihad*, we should work within a harmonious civilizational endeavor to renew our life and advance it in all areas of civilizational edification and ensure that our Ummah is one of a renewal that is observant of its specificities, attached to the constants of its religion, open to modern times to

draw benefit from their advantages, creativity and achievements, provided these do not clash with the essences of the religion, the indissoluble link and the tightest of all bonds. Only thus, can we fulfill the much needed modernization, make this renewal beneficial to us, and ensure the continuity of the various loops of the chain of progress, growth and civilizational ascent, true to the divine words: [*Thus, have We made of you an Ummat justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves.*]⁽²⁾ Being a witness over other nations is only possible through a civilizational distinction that is born out of *ijtihad* and renewal.

Sheikh Mohamed Ibn Abdelwahab and Sheikh Mohamed al-Shawkani: Pioneering Revivers

The renewal of Islamic thought in contemporary times was initiated by a select group of reformist scholars such as Sheikh Mohamed Ibn Abdelwahab (1703-1791AD) from the Arab Peninsula and Sheikh Mohamed Ibn Ali al-Shawkani (1759-1834AD) from Yemen.

The renewal initiated by those pioneering scholars in the field of purifying the faith from superstition, aberrations and heresies deeply influenced the Islamic intellectual life and affected, in one way or another, most fields of Islamic thought in the 18th and 19th centuries. It can safely be said that this impact reached the Indian subcontinent as it appears from the books of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi including “*Hujjatullabi al-Baligha*” (The Profound Evidence of Allah) which is about the secrets of Sharia and the philosophy of

(2) *Surat al-Baqarah* (The Cow), verse 143.

Islamic legislation, and those of Nadershah and Ahmed Khan. Its influence even reached Central Asia and Russia. Musa Bigiev Musa Jarullah, was an eminent renewal Islamic scholar in Tsarist pre-revolution Russia. But the Tsarist Russian occupation of the Islamic territories such as Kazan in Tatarstan and Ufa in Bashkortan and oppression of religious schools in Bukhara, Tashkent and Samarkand in Uzbekistan put an end to that influence.

The subsequent calls of Jamal Eddine al-Afghani and his disciples Mohamed Abdu, Abderrahman al-Kawakibi, Sheikh Hussein al-Jisr, Sheikh Mohamed Rachid Reda, Khair Eddine al-Tounsi, Abdellah al-Nadim, al-TaHER al-Jazaïri, Mohamed Farid Wajdi, Abdelhamid bin Badis, Abderrahmane al-Thaalibi, Badii al-Zamâne Saïd al-Nourusi, Mohamed Mustafa al-Maraghi, Abdelaziz Jawich, Mohamed al-TaHER bin Achour, and Mohamed al-Khader Hussein were all founded on the renewal of Islamic thought, each in its own way. The epoch in which they emerged was one of revival, awakening, and renewal of Islamic thought.

The Spirit of Renewal in Sheikh Mohamed Abdu's and Sheikh al-Jisr's Works

Sheikh Mohamed Abdu's **Risalat al-Tawhid** (Theology of Unity) embodied the spirit of renewal of all the knowledge acquired by Muslims throughout the ages in scholastic theology and the sound understanding of Islamic faith. The same applies to Sheikh Hussein al-Jisr's and his two books "**al-Risala al-Hamidiya**" and "**al-Husun al-Hamidiya**" which is considered in academic terms a novel presentation and analysis of the objectives of Sharia, a critique of the beliefs of followers of religions, sects and creeds and a response to materialist atheist thought.. As for **Tabai' al-Istibdad**

wa Masare' al-Isti'bad (The Attendants of Despotism and the Destruction of Subjugation) by Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, it is a clear example of Islamic political thought renewal. These two renewal scholars have greatly contributed to enriching the Islamic thought and the emergence of modern renewal intellectual schools.

If we review the lists of books published in the Muslim world, particularly the Arab one since the Awakening, we will be surprised to find that the first person to use the term '**renewal**' in the title of a book was Dr Taha Hussein who defended his PhD dissertation at the Egyptian University in 1914 on 'The Memory of Abu al-Alaa al-Maarri' (**Tajdid Dhikra Abu al-Alaa al-Maarri**) which he later on published in a book. We are not overly interested in the content of this book which had the merit of being the first PhD dissertation to be discussed at a university in the Arab world, and perhaps even the Muslim world. What is of greater interest to us is that the word '*tajdid*' appeared for the first time in this title.

At all events, Dr Taha Hussein, despite all the criticisms directed at him, especially on his book **On Jahiliyya Poetry**, was one of the pioneers of the renewal of Arabic writing, coming right after Sheikh Mohamed Abdu who advocated the renewal of Islamic thought and of Arabic. Needless to say, the renewal of Arabic writing styles is one facet of Islamic thought renewal in general since Arabic is the vehicle of this thought.

Modern Islamic Thought Currents

Islamic thought currents were many and its schools were diverse from the first stirrings of awakening and revival in the 19th century. Still, these currents can be divided into three main trends:

- **First category:** a movement in favor of inherited tradition.
- **Second category:** a movement in favor of imitation of the West.
- **Third:** a movement advocating renewal and revival.

As tends to happen, these intellectual trends came into collision whenever trouble arose in Islamic societies. This conflict gave birth to a crisis of Islamic thought that is not abating even today and has taken many shapes. Therefore, resolving the crisis of Islamic thought entails that we understand that Islam follows a unique path to renewal and that renewal does not mean obviating what is old. Renewal and modernism - in the Western sense that we addressed earlier - are two opposites, because our intellectual legacy originates from what was revealed by a divine source and which represented and continues to represent in the life of the Muslim Ummah, the primary originator of its civilizational, national and intellectual existence, the author of its unity, the defining marker of its identity, and the foundation of a civilization that stands out and achieves distinction in the forum of civilizations and among nations and peoples. The root of our intellectual legacy is one of its fundamentals, and to declare it as obsolete is tantamount to obliterating what sets this Ummah apart and represents its hallmark.

Whilst the act of abrogation or declaring something as obsolete is not an option with regard to the intrinsic part of our intellectual legacy represented by the Quranic message and the Prophet's clarifications of this message, renewal in these constants is possible, not because the Prophet's hadith urged for 'renewing the religion' -and not our religious thought only- but because this renewal is the only means for this constant to fulfill the role entrusted to it in the Ummah's life. For this message of the Quran and the

prophet's clarifications to endure as a constant in the Ummah's life, they must retain their power to influence life. And to ensure the continued impact of this constant on the renewal of life, we need to apply renewal to reveal the true face of its principles, precepts, methods and rulings, and purify it from heresies and their pitfalls, from the cloak of myths and cumulus of charlatantry and from the perversions of opinion.

We concur with Dr Mohamed Amara who wrote in his book **Crisis of Modern Islamic Thought** that the movement of renewal and revival of Islamic thought was broad and covered widely disparate groups in terms of their interests, degree or criteria of renewal. The Islamic thought revival and renewal movement sprang from the following sources:

- Principles of Islam, as represented by its pure sources: the Quranic message and the prophet's explanations of the Holy Quran as represented by the immutable Sunnah of the Prophet.
- The fundamentals of Arab and Islamic heritage which represent the features of the Ummah's civilizational identity and have helped generations maintain their civilizational bonds and their unity as an Ummah through time and space.
- All creations of the human mind throughout the various civilizations, as represented by the facts and laws that represent sciences with unchanging subjects despite the succession of myriad civilizations and beliefs, i.e. neutral scientific subjects that represent a common human denominator that differs from human sciences. This includes culture which falls under the specificities that

guarantee the distinction of civilizations. And how true were the words of the Prophet when he said, “*Wisdom is the lost property of the believer, so wherever he finds it then he has a right to it.*”

In his book **Figures of Islamic Renewal from the 1st to the 14th Century**, Sheikh Abdel Mota'al al-Se'edi says that Islam expands to accommodate renewal in every age. If its objective is the global advancement of humanity, then the means of this advancement, unlike rituals, flow in an upward direction and are not stalled in their progression since they rely on advances in science and knowledge and Man cannot reach perfection in science no matter how long he lives or even if his life extends to the end of times. The Almighty says: [*Of knowledge, it is only a little that is communicated to you,*] to open wide the gates of excellence and renewal in knowledge, and so that knowledge-induced arrogance finds no way to our hearts, for arrogance stands in the way of soaring to higher spheres of knowledge and renewal, and leads to loathsome stagnation.

If renewal in religion and in knowledge is a possibility in all cases, then renewal in Islamic thought is even more of a possibility.

Jurisprudence of Middle Stance and Renovation

And as Sheikh Dr Youssef al-Qaradawi said in his book “**The Jurisprudence of Middle Stance and Renewal**”, the renewal we aim at is not that of the wasteful and the immoral who seek

(3) *Surat al-Israa'* (The Resurrection), verse 85.

to change the Ummah's benchmarks to other than the Quran, its mastery to other than Mohammed, its *qibla* to other than Makkah, and its law to other than the Sharia. Those are not champions of renewal, they are destructors and squanderers, they emulate instead of innovate, blind followers and not the masters of their own fate. They are bent on renewing everything, and as Dr Mohamed Iqbal said to some: "*The Kaaba will not be renewed by bringing new stones for it from Europe.*"

Sheikh al-Qaradawi explains the true meaning of renewal and says that it is a renewal built on fundamentals, attached to the roots, seeking inspiration from heritage, questioning history, linking today to yesterday, a renewal that does not disavow the ancestors but enriches their legacy, adding to their scientific and civilizational heritage, choosing the best in it and shunning what is of little benefit, or as our ancestor said 'taking the pure and leaving the murky.

Once we adopt this exact and objective concept, renewal as a contributory factor to modernization becomes the Islamic alternative to Western modernism as this term holds specific connotations.

While movements of Islamic thought renewal have evolved within a tremendous legacy of intellectual production and impacted political parties and religious groups, diverse as they may be in their leanings and convictions, renewal in political and administrative sciences has failed to meet the requirements of civilizational change and to advance the Islamic world. Many books were written on renewing the fundamentals of *fiqh*, *fiqh* and Muslim political thought. Among these highly valuable books is Dr Mohamed Salim al-Awwa's **Islamic Fiqh on the Path to Renewal** in which he responds to

Jamal al-Banna's book **Towards a New Fiqh**. Let us just clarify here that the renewal of Islamic *fiqh* is at the same time a renewal of Islamic thought in a broader sense.

Renewing Muslim Political Thought

Dr Mohamed Salim al-Awwa says in his book: *“Stagnation has come to plague the Islamic political thought among the Sunnis. Books and studies were fully dedicated to the issues of caliphate, allegiance, the obligation of obedience, the forms of governing and the types of ministry, in utter dissociation from what is happening in public life in all Islamic states and the successive changes of ruling regimes and modes of political action. Stagnation also affected the Islamic political thought among the Shiites. Much research was carried out on the conditions of inerrancy and its obligation in imams, and concluding with the impossibility of establishing an Islamic state in the absence of the 12th virtuous imam. One of the virtues of contemporary Islamic awakening is that mujtabids and thinkers, who were conscious of the dangers of a prolonged state of stagnation, have broken down the barrier of fear. Many instances of ijtihad in Islamic political thought were recorded among the Sunni scholars and thinkers, as well as among the Imamiyah Shiites.”*

This modern trend among today's Islamic thought renewal schools is the most responsive to the needs of the Muslim suffering the many injustices and deviations of tyrannical regimes which, in some instance, even negate the Sharia objectives that protect man's rights and safeguard his dignity. Renewal in this aspect of Islamic thought is in fact a realistic renewal that impacts on true reality and does not meander in the realms of futile intellectual theorizing.

The scope of action of Islamic thought renewal is wide and its means and ways are many. Yet, not every renewal action enriches

Islamic thought, consolidates it or spurs it to explore further horizons and anticipate the future. In fact, renewal can be positive as well as negative. Of the existing Islamic thought renewal trends some even go against the grain of Islam's precepts and the objectives of its Sharia. Some pseudo-advocates of Islamic thought renewal are actually undermining Islam. At the same time, advocates in other currents of renewal lean more towards extremism, radicalism and introversion, heedless of the changes affecting the reality of Muslims, and seemingly far removed from the true meaning of renewal. This said, the dominant trend in renewal in today's juncture is one of moderation in belief, understanding and conduct, and a renewal with a multifaceted scope.

Reconstruction in Mohamed Iqbal's Works

The first scholar in the contemporary age of Islamic renaissance to use the term of religious renewal instead of religious reform (although he called it 'reconstruction') was the Muslim philosopher Dr Mohamed Iqbal. His book "**Reconstructing Religious Thought in Islam**" was published in the thirties of the previous century and translated into Arabic in Cairo by Abbas Mahmoud (incidentally, not the great thinker Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqqad). A valuable book from a thinker with a profound knowledge and great insight into the intellectual reality of the Muslim world.

Mohamed Iqbal was meticulous in his choice of words when he described this renewal dynamic as the reconstruction of religious thought without using the term religious reform, knowing that any human endeavor undertaken in the context of Islam cannot have as target the amendment of its principles since its source, which is the Noble Quran, enjoys the attribute of absoluteness and eternal

affirmation, and that any reform movement in Islam should tackle Islamic thought and how Muslims understand its principles, and that any development or renewal in Islam remains in this light limited to the sphere of the Muslims' understanding and their interpretation of its precepts.

“**The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam**” was published in English in 1930 in Lahore. It was originally a compilation of seven lectures delivered by Mohamed Iqbal to students in Madras, Hyderabad, and Aligarh. The second edition of the book was published in 1934 by Oxford University Press. The Arabic translation of which a first edition was published in Cairo in 1955 by the Committee of Authorship, Translation and Publication was titled *Renewal of Islamic Thought in Islam (Tajdid al-Fikr al-Dini fi al-Islam)*⁽⁴⁾, and renewal is after all reconstruction. Mohamed Iqbal's book can certainly be considered as a vanguard attempt at the renewal of Islamic thought.

Renewing Islamic thought is reconstructing this thought in order to reconstruct the civilizational edifice of the Muslim world.

(4) A second translation, by Muhammad Yusuf Adas, was published by Alexandrina Bibliotheca, Egypt, in 2011.

References and bibliography

- “*Al-Fiqh al-Islami fi tarik al-Tajdid*” (The Islamic Fiqh on the Path to Renewal), Dr Mohamed Salim al-Awwa (Az-Zaman publishing house, Rabat, 2008).
- “*Al-Mujaddidun fi al-Islam min al-Qarn al-Awwal ila al-Qarn Ar-Rabi’ ‘ashir*” (Figures of Islamic Renewal from the 1st to the 14th Century), Sheikh Abdel Mota’al al-Se’edi (al-Aadab library, Cairo, 1996).
- “*Tajdid al-Fikr al-Dini fi al-Islam*” (Reconstructing Religious Thought in Islam), Mohamed Iqbal (translated by Abbas Mahmud - Authoring, Translation and Publishing Committee, Cairo, 1955).
- “*Azmat al-Fikr al-Islami al-hadeeth*” (The Crisis of Modern Islamic Thought), Dr Mohamed Amara (Dar al-Fiqr, Damascus, 1998).
- “*Fiqh al-Hadbara al-Islamiyya*” (Islamic Civilization’s Jurisprudence), Dr Mohamed Amara (al-Sharq Ad-Dawliyya library, Cairo, 2003).
- “*Tajdid al-Khitab al-Dini*” (Renewing the Religious Discourse), Dr Mohamed Salim al-Awwa (Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Cairo, 2003).
- “*Ilal Wa Adwiyat*” (Problems and Solutions in Human Life Cycle), Mohamed al-Ghazali (Dar al-Fiqr, Damascus, 2002).
- “*Mu’jam Lughat al-Fuqaha*” (Dictionary of Islamic Legal Terminology), Muhammad Rawwas Qal’ah’ji (Dar al-Nafais, Beirut, 1996).
- “*Al-Fiqr al-Islami al-Hadeet wa silatuhu bi al-Isti’mari al-Gharbi*” (Modern Islamic Thought and its Relation to Western Colonialism), Dr Muhammad al-Bahi (Dar al-Fikr for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Beirut, 1973).

- “*Murtakazat al-Khitab al-Dini al-Mu’assir*” (The Bases for a Modern Islamic Discourse), Dr Mohamed Kamal Imam (a paper presented as part of the symposium themed “Renewing the Religious Discourse: How and Why?” with the participation of a group of scholars and thinkers, Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Cairo, 2003).
- “*Ta’ammulat fi qadbaya mu’assira* (Reflections on Contemporary Issues), Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, Dar al-shourouq, Cairo, 2002).
- “*Al-alam al-Islami fi Asr al-Awlam*” (The Muslim World in the Age of Globalization), Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, Dar al-Shourouq, Cairo, 2004.
- “*Azmat al-Fikr al-Islami fi al-Asr al-Hadith: Madhabiroba, Asbaboha, Tlajoha*” (The Crisis of Islamic Thought in the Modern Time: Manifestations, Reasons and Remedy), Dr Abdul-hamid Mitwali, Monshaat Al-Maarif, Alexandria, 1975.
- “*Al-Risala al-Hamidiya Fi Haqiqat al-Diyana al-Islamiya wa-haqiqat al-Shari’a al-Muhammadiya*” (A Hamidian treatise on the truth of Islam and the Shari’a), Hussein al-Jisr, foreworded and authenticated by Khalid Ziyada, Madbouli Library, Cairo, 2011.
- “*Al-Hoson al-Hamidiya Limohadbat al-‘aqaid al-Islamiya*” (Hamidian Bastions of Islamic Creeds), Hussein al-Jisr, al-Tawfiq Printing House, Cairo, 1323 A.H.
- “*Hujjat Allah al-Baligha*” (The Profound Evidence from God), Shah Wali Allah of Delhi, authenticated by Sayid Sabiq, Dar al-Jil, Beirut, 2005.
- “*Kitab al-Tamhid alladhi huwa haqq Allabi ‘ala ‘l-‘abid*” (The Book of the Unity of God), Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab,

authenticated by Abu Malik al-Riyashi Ahmed bin Ali bin Mathna al-Qufaili, Abdulrahman Library and al-Ulum wal-Hikam Library, Cairo, undated.

- “*Nail al-Awtar min Asrar Muntaqa al-Akbbar*” (Attainment of the Objective According to Evidences of the Ordinances), Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Shawkani, authenticated by Tariq Ibn Awadhallah Muhammad, Dar Ibn al-Qayyim, Dar Ibn Affan.
- “*Al-Akadimiyya*” (The Academy) Journal, Issue 30, Rabat, 2013.