Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations

Mohamed Haddad

Muslim Reformism - A Critical History

Is Islamic Religious Reform Possible?

Springer

Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations

Volume 11

The purpose of Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations is to publish high quality volumes that reflect original research pursued at the juncture of philosophy and politics. Over the past 20 years new important areas of inquiry at the crossroads of philosophy and politics have undergone impressive developments or have emerged anew. Among these, new approaches to human rights, transitional justice, religion and politics and especially the challenges of a post-secular society, global justice, public reason, global constitutionalism, multiple democracies, political liberalism and deliberative democracy can be included. Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations addresses each and any of these interrelated yet distinct fields as valuable manuscripts and proposal become available, with the aim of both being the forum where single breakthrough studies in one specific subject can be published and at the same time the areas of overlap and the intersecting themes across the various areas can be composed in the coherent image of a highly dynamic disciplinary continent. Some of the studies published are bold theoretical explorations of one specific theme, and thus primarily addressed to specialists, whereas others are suitable for a broader readership and possibly for wide adoption in graduate courses. The series includes monographs focusing on a specific topic, as well as collections of articles covering a theme or collections of articles by one author. Contributions to this series come from scholars on every continent and from a variety of scholarly orientations.

More information about this series at http://www.springer.com/series/13508

Mohamed Haddad

Muslim Reformism - A Critical History

Is Islamic Religious Reform Possible?

Springer

Mohamed Haddad
University of Carthage
Tunis, Tunisia

Translated from French into English by Sarya Baladi (Boston College)

This publication was made possible thanks to the international association Reset Dialogues on Civilization, based in Italy, and its partner organization Reset Dialogues, USA, with the support of the NOMIS Foundation of Zurich and the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Muslim Reformism was previously published in Italian (*Una riforma religiosa nell'Islam è ancora possibile*?, Jaca Book, 2011) and French (*Le réformisme musulman. Une histoire critique*, Mimesis, 2013).

ISSN 2352-8370 ISSN 2352-8389 (electronic)
Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations
ISBN 978-3-030-36773-2 ISBN 978-3-030-36774-9 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36774-9

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

To the memory of my father, Hâjj Brâhîm, a pious Muslim and dutiful man. I also dedicate this book to my daughter, Linda: I wish her a life of peace, dignity, and freedom and for her never to be made to live in the conditions of her great grandmothers.

Foreword: A Word of Caution

Since the so-called Arab Spring, there has been more and more talk of "moderate Islam." Despite the value judgment inherent from within, we must recognize that this expression might refer to something specific. In fact, Islamism has been split into two camps since the end of the 1970s. One of these devolved into an infernal cycle of violence and counter-violence, attacking both Islamic and Western governments, accusing the latter of supporting the former. Another camp remained loyal to the initial precepts of the Egyptian founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna, according to whom societies must be conquered from below after a long process of peaceful persuasion. Al-Banna's Muslim State was to be promoted by the people themselves and not imposed by violence.

At first, the difference between these two currents perpetuated a set of *tactics* rather than a set of *objectives* of establishing an Islamic State under Sharia law. Nevertheless, after the events of September 11, 2001, the so-called "moderate" current – which this book calls "pragmatic Islamism" – took steps to distinguish itself from radical figures of Islamism (Wahhabis, Pakistani Jama'a, Sayyid Qutb, violent Jihadis, etc.) and to incorporate the reformist tradition in its discourse. It is this current that today still largely benefits from the aftermath of the "Arab Spring," winning elections and rising to the highest level of political institutions.

Does this trend toward reformism reflect real conviction? Or is it simply an attempt to make a good impression on local elites and foreign observers? The whole future of the "Arab Spring" depends on the answer to this question. It is clear now that "modernist" currents, in turn, have embraced the reformist tradition in order to parry the dazzling advance of pragmatic Islamism. In recent years, reformism has become a key reference for both.

Many Western observers have been so blinded by the theory of political Islam's "failure" that they did not anticipate the rise of a pragmatic Islamism which had been preparing the terrain for two decades. If there has been a failure, it is the failure of radical Islam – which is not necessarily obvious. The Arab world is too attached to religion to accept radical secularism. Reformism is defined by the attempt to propose a middle ground between the modern values of secularization, democracy, human rights, historicity, science, gender equality, and minority rights on the one

hand and certain inescapable precepts of the Muslim religion on the other. Reformism does not have a specific table of contents: it is a method drawn upon for different motivations by some and not by others.

However, this practical application is in itself a new phenomenon. Having worked on reformism for over a quarter of a century, I have long noticed the indifference on both sides to the problems raised by Muslim reformism. The secularists judged these problems as outdated, and the Islamists did not want to engage in real discussions of these issues and risk undermining a delicate balance between two very different references, meaning reformism and Islamism. The situation radically changed after the "Arab Spring." The future of this so-called Spring will not be decided between secularists and reformists but rather between two discourses that claim reformism in their own way, one wanting to push it to the end of its modernization capabilities and the other confining it to a façade of syncretism. Tunisia illustrates this point well. During the drafting of the new Constitution, the secularists were too much of a minority in the overall picture to be able to impose the principle of secularism on the state, and the Islamists were too concerned of shocking a section of the population by imposing Sharia. Finally, both sides fell back on the theory of "civility of the state" (*madaniyyat al-dawla*), which was first elaborated a century earlier by Muhammad Abduh, one of the leading figures of Muslim reformism, who appears frequently in this book.

This book will thus give an overview of Muslim reformism: its rise, its promises and its limits, the reasons why it stumbled – and for its comeback – the essential elements of its method and its problems, etc. More than ever, a critical history of reformism is useful to truly and authentically understand the debates that are coursing through the Arab world and the Muslim communities in the West. Mohamed Arkoun became my thesis director during my first research foray into Muslim Reformism. We formed a solid friendship and intellectual complicity despite our different opinions on the subject. Writing this book gave us another opportunity to revisit reformism and to give different prognoses on the future of the Arab world. That is why I invited him to express his views in a postface at the end of this book. Arkoun, who passed away a few months after the start of the Arab Spring, prophesied the dazzling awakening of Islam. He gave his text titled "When Islam Awakens" although he imagined this awakening quite differently. The postface and this book were written before the "Arab Spring," but the issues evoked are the same that continue to agitate the Arab world and Islam today.

University of Carthage
Tunis, Tunisia

Mohamed Haddad

Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction: The Missing Reform

Abstract The analysis of Islam in the modern world continues to be colored by Hegel's "confused conscious of history." The confusion expresses itself in two ways, like two faces of a coin: by analogy and through denigration. The wave of Islamist terror unleashed on 9/11 presented another opportunity to expose this confusion. For some, Islam is in no way responsible for the violence that has spread over the entire world, just as it is in no way responsible for the setbacks of free thought in the Medieval Age or for the difficulties of current Muslim societies to modernize. According to this point of view, the responsibility falls exclusively on misguided minorities who pervert the essence of Islam and alter its radiant face. For others, who are at times nostalgic for plans to exterminate religions (or men and women of religion), it has been convenient to make Islam the shorthand for what is really a complex socio-historical situation. Islam is presented as the source of all the evils of Muslims and of the problems of our time. We are thus prisoners of two inadequate schemas: unapologetic proponents of fideism, on the one hand, and the "eradicators" who entertain the illusion that one can somehow just get rid of one of the world's great religions, on the other.

Keywords Reform · Abduh · Wahhabism · Trœltsch · Harnack · Hegel

The analysis of Islam in the modern world continues to be colored by Hegel's "confused conscious of history." The confusion expresses itself in two ways, like two faces of a coin: by analogy and through denigration. The wave of Islamist terror unleashed on 9/11 presented another opportunity to expose this confusion. For some, Islam is in no way responsible for the violence that has spread over the entire world, just as it is in no way responsible for the setbacks of free thought in the Medieval Age or for the difficulties of current Muslim societies to modernize. According to this point of view, the responsibility falls exclusively on misguided minorities who pervert the essence of Islam and alter its radiant face. For others, who are at times nostalgic for plans to exterminate religions (or men and women of religion), it has been convenient to make Islam the shorthand for what is really a complex socio-historical situation. Islam is presented as the source of all the evils of

M. Haddad, *Muslim Reformism - A Critical History*, Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations 11, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36774-9_1

Muslims and of the problems of our time. We are thus prisoners of two inadequate schemas: unapologetic proponents of fideism, on the one hand, and the "eradicators" who entertain the illusion that one can somehow just get rid of one of the world's great religions, on the other.

1.1 Religious Reform as a Universal Paradigm

As a result, the idea of reform in Islam is fiercely opposed from both points of view. For apologists, there is no issue whatsoever: one must simply conform to "authentic" Islam. For "eradicators," a good Muslim is a fanatic or a terrorist; every counterexample is insignificant, even heretical. The radicalization of this debate, far from being the means to precipitate change, proves to be the best way to justify immobility. However, we know that a religion undergoes the general evolution of a society and weighs, one way or another, on the social experience; this is as valid for Islam as for any other religion. The only realistic solution is to take seriously the religious problem and to treat it in its entirety and in its complexity, trying to circumscribe its negative consequences as much as possible. The religious problem is there, it is imposing and becoming more complex everywhere in the world. To take it seriously, we must begin by discarding the notion that religions are mere residues of a bygone past. It is necessary to substitute the Marxist or Comtian theory of a humanity which progresses linearly from Religion to Reason with Weberian- or Durkheimian-inspired theory of the metamorphosis of the religious.

The notion of "religious reform," which I have also used in my other work, is not a religious notion but rather the expression of a historical and socio-hermeneutic process. An event-based history and a descriptive sociology cannot suffice to explain religious facts, but hermeneutics which ignore historical and social reality will quickly transform into whimsical exegeses of the sacred texts. When I prepared my doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne in Paris on the Muslim reformer Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), I devoted a long methodological introduction broadening the concept of reform to encompass all the religious experiences expressed through writing and confronted with modernity. With difficulty, this idea has made its way into circulation.[1] Reform is intended here in the sense of a hermeneutic situation and a universal paradigm.

The term "Reform" has been a label for a long time. It originally referred to the movement led in the sixteenth century by Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. It is now agreed that the link between the sixteenth Century Reformation and modernity was not a cause-and-effect relationship. While the Reformation did pave the way to the modern world, sociologist and theologian Ernst Trœltsch states that "if that is so, it is thus obvious that the role played by Protestantism in the rise of the modern world

[1] We give some indications of these earlier works on modern Islamic history and the problems of its "reformation." We chose to write most of these works in Arabic, because we believe that it is essential to make their history known among Arabic-speaking Muslims who are the most concerned by this story.

is certainly nothing simple. There is no direct path that would lead from the ecclesial culture of Protestantism to modern culture free from all Church. Its role, as it is generally known, is in more ways than one an indirect or even involuntary role, and what is still in common between Protestantism and modern culture lies buried in the depths hidden from his thought, which are not immediately accessible to the consciousness."[2]

When other religious traditions have accepted that progress also affects religions and that the Enlightenment is unavoidable, the term has taken on a positive connotation and each tradition has come up with its own version of reform. Within the Christian tradition we can thus speak of multiple reforms, with each Church claiming its specificities and its own path of reform. Orthodox churches have had several religious authorities, such as Father George Florovsky (1893–1979), call for an opening of orthodoxy to the modern world under the guise of "return to the Fathers." Catholic thought admitted a process of reform which began before the Lutheran schism and gave some visionary popes the honor of having stimulated it. It went back to the Gregorian Reformation of the eleventh century, even to the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century. Moreover, it is generally accepted that the Counter-Reformation was not merely a negative reaction to Lutheranism, but rather a project to reform the Church without destroying it. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which considerably alleviated the tension between Catholicism and secularism, was in line with previous Councils while symbolizing openness to modernity. In European countries today, which remember the horrors of the Inquisition, we rightly fear a return to conservatism and a Catholic "riconquista" of society. As some fundamentalist Protestant circles in the United States and elsewhere have made evident, greater dangers originate outside Rome.

The same type of movement is found beyond Christian circles. Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) created the intellectual conditions in which Reform Judaism was born in the nineteenth century. This current was energized by the French Revolution. It was liberalized in Germany in the nineteenth century in a context of emancipation of the European Jews, even if the horror of the Holocaust later complicated the internal debates of Judaism on this subject.

Stimulated by the combination of modern thought and the Enlightenment, some Hindus have reinterpreted aspects of their tradition. Thus was born a reformed Hinduism, or rather a strain of reformist thought in Hinduism. This movement was initiated by Rammohan Roy (1772–1833) who took the name of Brahma Samja. It was pursued by several thinkers, such as the great poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). Before the Maoist revolution of 1949, Confucianism in China had begun a reform of under Kang Youwei (1858–1927).

A cross-sectional and comparative study of religious traditions confirms that, for believers, reform is an expression of the inherent potential of a religion to regenerate itself. For the scientific observer, reform is the result of the historical and social

[2] Troeltsch Ernst, *Protestantism and modernity*, translated from German by Marc B. de Launay, Gallimard, 1991, p. 45. Moreover, this point of view is confirmed by the French historian Lucien Febvre in his famous monograph on Luther: "Luther, one of the fathers of the modern world?" The French willingly use the formula, or other analogues and resonance.

pressure under which religions end up accepting new ideas under the guise of a return to an allegedly inalterable essence or to the authenticity of the sacred texts. Academic observation reserves the right to speak of inherent potentialities or essences of religious reforms since it tends to avoids talk of gods and miracles when explaining the origins of religions. However, it is necessary to distinguish between a positive observation that makes this avoidance a methodological requirement and a positivist observation for which militant atheism or "eradicationism" is the *sine qua non* condition of the treatment of a religious fact. One's position on the question of faith cannot be a requirement for studying the past and future of religion. Consequently, it is vital not merely to discuss the psychological motivations of reform but rather to demonstrate its *inevitability* in all contexts, including of course in the current contexts of Islam.

There seems to be an inescapable process that has begun since the beginning of modern times. Under the pressure of new social organizations and profound changes in knowledge and behavior, secular traditions operate with varying degrees of success, adapting with difficulty to survive an era in which they are not on the rise. Modernity first blossomed in Europe, so it was normal for Christianity to be the first to embark on this path. It has paid the highest price and brilliantly succeeded, at least judging by the present state of affairs. Other religious traditions face a twofold challenge: to serve as markers of identity in the face of Western expansion and to accept reform imposed by universal modernity born in the West. The first movement fuels conservatism and the second strengthens openness. The balance is therefore difficult to find between the two. Judaism, Orthodoxy, Hinduism, Confucianism, Islam, and other great traditions are struggling to find their path in light of this dilemma.

Europe is the only region in the world today to have attained a high degree of religious stability (and this can always change). It arrived at this stage only after experimenting with the Inquisition, the exile of Jews and Muslims of Spain, the Holy Wars, the bonfires, the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, the trials of Galileo and Michael Servetus, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the *Syllabus* of Pope Pius IX, etc.

Mankind would undergo interminable ordeals if all religious traditions took the European route to its point of arrival. It is necessary to shorten the path to limit the damage. However, it would be unreasonable to think that millions of religious people would change their religious behavior just because they read a book about European history! The processes would be long and painful, and they would probably not reach the length of time and the suffering of the European process. The European experience will help others, but cannot serve as a substitute for their own historical experiences.

The proposed approach is from the perspective of a study of comparative religions, applied to religious reforms. The aim is to open new avenues of research and to free oneself from religious schemes and representations. There is a tendency to think that comparative religious studies exists to study the origins of religions. Yet nothing prevents "reform" from being the subject of comparative study within

religious histories and traditions.[3] It appears obvious today that no religious reform can succeed without accepting the principle of secularization of the common public space. And it is even clearer that secularization does not spell the end of religion because they can adapt to it by reforming and transforming themselves. However, even in the most secularized societies, the religious problem does not lose its relevance. On the contrary, it seems destined to remain one of the most critical problems of the twenty-first century. Secular peace is unavoidable, but globalization already imposes a reality that should be understood in its full complexity. To say that classical secularism is no longer able to answer all the problems of our time does not mean the questioning of the principle of secularization itself. It is to express the hope of deepening it and adapting it to different situations that are still evolving.

This approach should not be confused with another respectable approach, which would like to find the true religion, explore the disfigured essence, and probe the Message that would have been betrayed by history. Trying to define the essence of a religion through the historical method is a project that has shown its limits since the infamous *Essence of Christianity* (1900) by Adolf von Harnack. History can illuminates the past of a religion, but it cannot decide its present and say what in the past must serve in the future. The willingness, however laudable, to use history to guide the thoughts and behaviors of contemporaries using "common sense" can lead to abuse and anachronism. It risks harming the work of "professional historians" without actually succeeding in exercising a real influence on the attitudes of believers.

The idea of reform was born in the context of the bitter military defeats that Muslim societies had faced against modern European nations. They soon realized that a military reform could not succeed without a revision of the administrative system, which could not be reorganized without undermining the social pyramid; this, in turn, implied political reforms. At the beginning of its modern phase, the Muslim world's "intelligentsia" was mainly trained in religious institutions, and it was natural to see this elite be invited to lead the reforms necessary for social progress. As a result, there formed an interdependent relationship between religious, political, and social issues. The language of all reform was a religious language because this "intelligentsia" could not operate in another language. The political, social, and religious spheres were strongly intertwined. As religion is the basis of social and political legitimacy, it finally became clear that it could not escape an in-depth reflection on its functions. Thus, the idea of religious reform has often been the consequence of the blocking of state and societal reforms.

This situation is now largely outdated. Modern societies are no longer structured by religion alone, but religion and religious sentiment remain. It is for this reason that a minimalist vision of religious reform must be encouraged and cultivated. The vocation of religious reform is to bring religious thought into line with the evolution

[3] See Bori, Haddad et Melloni (Editors), *Reforms: understanding and comparing their religions*, op. cit. à note 1, and Haddad (Ed.), *Religions et Religious Reforms*, Proceedings of the 2007 International Symposium in Amman, Jordan, op. cit. note 1.

of society and to ensure that this evolution is not hindered in the name of religion. It is far from simple!

Obviously, for all religions, the major challenge and the substantial contribution will be to propose a necessary spirituality to modern citizens – a spirituality that does not, however, exist in opposition to rationality and historicity, which are the intellectual foundations of our time. No religion can continue to claim exclusive representativeness of truth, sacredness, morality or identity. Religions generally offer two functions: identity and spirituality. Pushing too far in the direction of identity, as is currently the case in Islam, will ultimately weaken the second function, which is the specific contribution that religion has to offer.

1.2 Why Abduh?

Muhammad Abduh is a recurrent reference in this book because his work proves that Islamic religious thought from the 19th to the early twentieth century did not exclusively belong to the *Salafi* current and was not inspired by Ibn Taymiyya.[4] Reformist thought has three camps: conservatives, fundamentalists (Wahhabism), liberals. In other words, the divisions within Islam broadly resemble the map of all the great religious traditions of the world. It was around 1930s that the reformist tendency was absorbed by the other two, thus ending by distorting itself or being distorted. In 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood was created and managed to transform conservatism into a militant project and to offer a sedentary version of Wahhabism. It strongly contributed to the disfiguration of the liberal heritage of Islam of the 19th and early 20th centuries. My earlier work engages this process in detail by studying the reception of Abduh's ideas and contrasting this reception with his collected works.

In 2005, upon the 100th anniversary of Muhammad Abduh's death, a number of academic and cultural events were organized in Aleppo, Alexandria, Cairo, Tunis, Algiers, Lyon, and Leiden to honor Abduh for initiating a profound religious reformation in Islam – albeit one which later generations could never bring to a successful conclusion. The centenary of "Islam's Martin Luther" inspired a broad range of studies on Islamic reform, but studies of Abduh tend to drown in the same tired schemes that my work has sought to rebut.

[4] Salafism refers to the school of thought founded in the 14th century by Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328). It lived in a difficult period in the history of Islam: a few years before its birth in 1258, Baghdad was destroyed by the Mongols. Ibn Taymiyya wanted to give a new impulse to Islam by advocating for a strict return to his recommendations. He called Muslims to *jihad* and cast moral condemnation on sects, philosophers, and mystics. His views were poorly followed during his lifetime and he himself was imprisoned several times. However, he left an impressive number of books and his disciples were able to divulge his message, the most famous of them being *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya* (1292–1350). Wahhabism claims to be the heir of this rigorous and puritanical school of thought.

If this pattern persists, it is because there is somewhere a "convergence of interests" that favors a certain representation. Abduh's case is disturbing because he forces us to rethink several questions at once, some of which are related to the conception of religion, others to that of modernity, others to the divisions that we are used to making within history and within trends in Islam. Serious researchers preach with hesitation, it is ideologues who employ manipulation.

But what is the dominant version of Abduh that remains so authoritative and so persistent? The best answer to this question is found in the article "Muhammad Abduh" in the prestigious *Encyclopedia of Islam.* According to that entry: "Strong as may be the impulses he has received from the liberal thought of the West, his doctrines have their deepest roots, first and foremost, in the conservative-reformist tendency of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya."[5] I have had the opportunity to demonstrate, in a detailed study of Abduh's works, that he never read the works of two founders of Salafism quoted in the article. Moreover, their works were not yet printed in Egypt and Arab countries during Abduh's time. The article presents a stereotypical presentation that was forged in the 1930s and that has served as the basis for most scholarly studies. This view of him was perpetuated by Abduh's disciples: Rashid Rida (1865–1935) in particular, and Mustafa Abd al-Raziq (1885–1946).

The problem would have been minor had a "pragmatic" Islamism not begun to take shape since the 1980s. It sought to stand out from the most radical trend, known as "jihadism," and to reconcile with public authorities to give itself a better chance of settling and spreading in Muslim societies, including within European Muslim immigrant communities. It wanted to give itself legitimacy and virginity and was looking for founding fathers other than the cumbersome Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb. This revealed a kind of "reformist-conservative" of which Abduh was the most illustrious representative. The credit goes to the prolific Muhammad Umara, converted to this "non-violent" Islamism after a period of Marxist pan-Arabism. A successful writer in the Arab world, he is the publisher of Abduh's "Complete works" and the author of several essays on his life and his philosophy. Under his manipulative pen, Abduh is almost reduced to a precursor of the Muslim Brotherhood. Umara went very far in the disfigurement of Abduh, taking advantage of his publishing of Abduh's "Complete works." Moreover, these are not strictly speaking complete works, but more on that later.

In Europe, the tendentious vision forged by Umara has been propagated by Tariq Ramadan. In his book entitled *Sources of Muslim Renewal*, Ramadan writes: "Olivier Carré, Gilles Kepel, Olivier Roy, and François Burgat, among other researchers, are bringing back the 'chain' of contemporary Islamist thinkers from Hassan al-Banna in Egypt to Abul A'la Maududi in Pakistan, and they generally have little to no links with al-Afghani, Abduh, and the Reformers (…). The present study aims to prove that al-Banna is fully involved in this tradition and that its

[5] Article "Muhammad Abduh" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, t. VII, p. 421, 2nd edition, Leiden/Paris, Brill/Maisonneuve et Larose, 1993. Compare with our article "Reread Mr. Abduh: About Mr. Abduh's article in the Encyclopedia of Islam," op. cit. note 1.

historical contribution (the structure of the organization of the Muslim Brotherhood) has enabled him to concretely realize certain goals of those who preceded it."[6] In other words, the legacy of a century of reformism goes back to Hassan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood; the renewal of Islam is tantamount to fundamentalism. Such is the masterful stratagem of legitimizing fundamentalism through reformism and making it its prelude rather than its rival. In the chapter devoted to Abduh, about 40 pages long, Ramadan refers 36 times to Umara's works! He borrows the idea of a linked "chain" of modern Islam that begins with Wahhabism and transits through al-Afghani and Abduh to lead to the Muslim Brotherhood. This interpretation is now widespread in the Muslim world and in Muslim circles in Europe.[7]

It is therefore comprehensible why it is not easy to re-open Muhammad Abduh's file again, since the stakes go beyond the individual person. Discordant voices are usually fiercely rejected.[8] The question is so delicate because Abduh is such a central figure in the history of Islamic reform. Our understanding of him will depend on the understanding that we will have of this reformation, and thereby of the history of Islam in contemporary times, of the nature of the desired reforms and their legitimacy, and, to put it clearly, of the future of Islam in today's world. In other words, the way we represent Abduh will largely depend on the answer to the crucial question: Which reforms are possible in Islam today?

Indeed, this is not just an academic quarrel about the intellectual and spiritual biography of a famous person, but rather a conflict between memory and history. On the one hand we have the memory of the Islamic consciousness of its past and its present, and on the other hand we have the data of a critical body of history that borrows the methods and categories of human and social sciences. There are two ways to pose the problem of reformation in Islam. The first is to call on societal reformation so that it conforms to the community's memory of its past or to its supposed inaugural moment. The second is to call for the subversion of the religious memory so that it conforms to the evolution of a given society where believers live. In the first case, modern life is forced into the frozen mold of tradition and the literal exegesis of the sacred Scriptures. In the second case, it is tradition that needs to be reshaped and the Scriptures that will be reinterpreted according to the new needs of modern citizens. These are two diametrically opposed visions. The first is expressed by Wahhabism and the Muslim Brotherhood, the second is the spirit of reformism as envisioned by Abduh.

---

[6] *At the sources of the Muslim revival: from al-Afghani to Hassan al-Banna, a century of Islamic reformism*, ed. Tawhid, 2002. Ramadan is the grandchild of Hassan al-Banna.

[7] Without knowing it, Ramadan's detractors sometimes take back his representation of things. See for example Fourest Caroline et Venner Fiammetta, *Tirs croisés*, Calmann-Lévy, 2003, p. 411 and following.

[8] The fate of my doctoral thesis mentioned above also illustrates this point. Summarized and translated from French into Arabic, it found a publisher many years later, in 2003. Among all my scholarship on the history contemporary Islamic thought, the work I devoted to Abduh was the most coolly received. It is this mental resistance that I propose to analyze here.

1.3 De-wahhabizing Islam

Let us return for a moment to the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (E.I.) to gauge the extent of the damage. What do we find if we consult the entry on "*islah*" (reform)? One encounters a long article composed of two unequal parts: the first, entitled "Arab World," while the second and much briefer article groups together the Iranian, Turkish and Indo-Pakistani worlds.[9] This division is inappropriately Arab centric. The origins of the idea of *islah* in modern Islam are Ottoman and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, named as its principal Arab exponent, is believed to be from Persia.

The part about the Arab world is not different from the others only in length. It details the history, the "fundamental principles" and the main doctrinal positions of Islamic *islah* and it closes with a presentation on its present "situation" in the Arab world. It is clear that its ambition is to provide a conceptual framework for the notion of *islah*, and that is where the rub is. The reader is immediately confronted with this statement: "The notion of *islah*, so widespread in modern Islamic culture, also holds a solid place in Qur'anic vocabulary where the semantic field of the root S-L-H is very broad." In other words, the authors portray it as a continuous concept from Qur'an times to modern Islam, making its merry way for more than fourteen centuries without metamorphosis or rupture. As if the presence of these root letters S-L-H were somehow proof of this imaginary continuity!

The article ends with a pseudo-philological conclusion. Under the suggestive title: "The historical continuity of *islah*," the article states: "As an effort – individual or collective – aimed, on the one hand, at defining Islam exclusively by reference to its authentic sources, that is, the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, and on the other hand, at ensuring that the lives of Muslims are truly in conformity with the norms and values of their religion from a personal and social point of view, *islah* appears as a permanent feature in Islamic religious and cultural history." In other words, *islah* is simply defined as the effort to "seek to restore Islamic values in the modern Muslim City."

Therefore, in this view, community values need not reform according to the exigencies of modernity. On the contrary, the modern City must return to the sources of Islam. Without the slightest hesitation, the *islah* entry in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* offers up the retrograde view that the City must bend to the Source rather than, say, a process in which a Source is rebuilt according to the modern needs of the City. This definition of *islah* is no different from what one finds in the treaties of *Salafism* and Muslim fundamentalism.

It is also very curious that a notional introduction to *islah*, in an entry that includes Shia *islah*, defines the Source as the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The Sunnah, in Arab Islam, is a compilation of the actions and saying of Muhammad recorded in six canonical works, of which at least two are considered irreproachable: *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*. However, Persian Shia Islam in no way recognizes the authority of these canonical sources, for which it substitutes the single volume

[9] Cf. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, t. III, pp. 146–170.

riwayat al-a'imma (transmissions of infallible Shia imams). Any return to the sources is thus already compromised by this intra-Muslim divergence with regard to the canons that define those sources. Doubling down, the entry insists that

> The community has always counted on men motivated by the desire to assume precisely this prophetic mission of *islah*. In its beginnings as in its later developments, *islah* has identified itself, roughly speaking, with the service of the Sunnah, the latter supposed to offer the best model of Islamic life […] *Islah* appears first as the expression of total loyalty to the Prophet's Tradition. This active, and sometimes militant, fidelity derives its significance from defending the Sunnah in the face of blameworthy innovations (*bid'as*) (147).

It should be recalled here that this quotation is not from a holy text, but rather an encyclopedia entry drawing on history and philology. Yet it is difficult not to see the personal commitment of its author in this Salafi vision of a trans-historical community that dreams only of a return to the origins.

This vision preaches the primacy of the Sunnah and tradition, while the history of the reformation of Islam in modern times shows the exact opposite. As evidenced by Abduh's case, to free oneself from the shackles of tradition was the basic principle of the idea of reformation, because it allowed for greater latitude to interpret the Qur'an according to new needs of the City. The "innovations" were legitimized through a new interpretation of the Qur'an rather than being condemned as *bid'as*, or blameworthy innovations (the Arabic word *bid'a* means both innovation and blame, it is the antonym of the word Sunnah). The authors thus perpetuate vision of reform that was first developed in the wake of Salafi Islam, and pass from a vision of piety to a supposedly "historical" story – all with the scientific legitimation of a prestigious Encyclopedia. The creed of any true reformer, according to this entry, is "To refute the errors of the century, to fight against sects supposed to introduce reprehensible innovations, to bring the faithful back to the purity of the primitive faith and worship, to restore the Sunnah by the study and imitation of the Prophet's Tradition."

This book proposes to show that on the contrary, both for Abduh and for the whole movement which came to be known as Reformist, the principle aspiration went in the opposite direction. They sought instead to reconcile Islam with the century in which they lived, to transcend its schisms, to establish a modus vivendi between faith and the principles of modernity, and to liberate Islam from the shackles of tradition so Muslims may live in their own times. I have deliberately chosen the Encyclopedia of Islam as a target of critique. Without underestimating its undeniable qualities, this prestigious publication fell victim of a situation Mohamed Arkoun described perfectly:

> Classical Islamology is beholden to a study of Islam through the writings of doctors who are claimed as such by the faithful. At first sight, this choice seems driven by a concern for authenticity and objectivity. Islamologists know that they are outside their object of study; to avoid any arbitrary judgment, they will therefore transpose, in any Western language, the content of Islamic texts […]. Islamologists behave like impassive museum guides.[10]

[10] Arkoun Mohamed, *For a critique of Islamic reason*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 1984, p. 44.

This situation is no longer acceptable. Not only does it spread questionable ideas in the name of philological and historical science, it is also inadvertently complicit in dubious schemes.

This book suggests that the source of "evil" should be approached through a critical rereading of Abduh and the entire history of the Islamic Reformation in modern times. It aims to prove that this reformation did not begin with Wahhabism and does not lead inexorably to the Muslim Brotherhood. Moreover, it will highlight the most important open construction sites and urgent projects for religious reform in Islam today. The goal is not to say that a reform in Islam has already taken place, but rather to show that it is in itself possible. The evidence refutes the deterministic view that each religion is a world apart and unto itself, condemning Islam and Muslims to the current situation in which they find themselves. It lately seems that this determinism has replaced the old geography- and climate-based determinisms of the eighteenth century, the racial determinism of the eighteenth century and the economic determinism of the twentieth century. In the lineage of an old tradition incarnated by thinkers like Ibn Sina, al-Tawhidi or Miskawayh, none of whom were theologians or imams, I would like to situate my scholarship as a thinker of Islam and witness of his culture. My wish is to offer Muslims reasonable perspectives about the relationship they have with their religion and to present to any curious reader the components of a complex situation to enable him or her to better understand the problem of Islam today.

References

Arkoun, Mohamed. 1984. *For a Critique of Islamic Reason*, 44. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose.

Troeltsch, Ernst. 1991. *Protestantism and Modernity*. Translated from German by Marc B. de Launay, 45. Gallimard.

Part I
Classical Reformism: The Birth and Decline of a Paradigm

Chapter 2
A Muslim Reformist: Muhammad Abduh

Abstract His life can be distilled in a few key dates: Abduh was born in 1849 and grew up in a small Egyptian village called Mahallat Nasr. He studied at a Qur'anic school, then at the Ahmadite Mosque located in the city of Tanta. Instruction there consisted of learning the Qur'an by heart, accustoming oneself to the chanting of it according to ritual, and studying the legal sciences of Islam and Arabic grammar. On the subject of Abduh's life, there are no great divergences to report; it is on his work and his memory that there are various narratives. A mysterious paternal uncle, Shaykh Darwish Khidr, guided him in that direction. Shaykh Darwish most probably belonged to the mystical Sanusi brotherhood which advocated for a return to pure Islam in its primitive simplicity. Abduh joined the al-Azhar religious university in 1865. Al-Azhar was the dream of any young man from rural areas as it offered great opportunities for social advancement. However, its teaching was obsolete, based mainly on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and grammar; the dominant method was that of literal commentary (sharh). Muhammad Abduh pursued his studies at al-Azhar for 12 years and received its highest degree in 1877. During his studies, he came into contact with the man who would greatly influence his life, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (On the rather obscure life of al-Afghani, one can consult the biography published by Homa Pakdaman titled *Djamal ed-Din Assad Abadi dit Afghani*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 1969).

Keywords Abduh · Reform · Salafism · Mysticism · Exegeses · Modernity · Liberalism

2.1 The Life of Abduh

His life can be distilled in a few key dates: Abduh was born in 1849 and grew up in a small Egyptian village called Mahallat Nasr. He studied at a Qur'anic school, then at the Ahmadite Mosque located in the city of Tanta. Instruction there consisted of learning the Qur'an by heart, accustoming oneself to the chanting of it according to

M. Haddad, *Muslim Reformism - A Critical History*, Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations 11, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36774-9_2

ritual, and studying the legal sciences of Islam and Arabic grammar. On the subject of Abduh's life, there are no great divergences to report; it is on his work and his memory that there are various narratives.

Like Luther, he never knew the school system of his day. He decided to abandon his studies, but his father managed to force him to return to school. Also in common with Luther, he attraction to spirituality allowed him to escape from the prevailing juridicism. A mysterious paternal uncle, Shaykh Darwish Khidr, guided him in that direction. Shaykh Darwish most probably belonged to the mystical Sanusi brotherhood which advocated for a return to pure Islam in its primitive simplicity. Abduh joined the al-Azhar religious university in 1865. Al-Azhar was the dream of any young man from rural areas as it offered great opportunities for social advancement. However, its teaching was obsolete, based mainly on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and grammar; the dominant method was that of literal commentary (sharh). Muhammad Abduh pursued his studies at al-Azhar for 12 years and received its highest degree in 1877. During his studies, he came into contact with the man who would greatly influence his life, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani.[1]

Ten years his senior, al-Afghani had settled in Egypt to flee a hate campaign against him in Istanbul. A lecture he gave in the capital of the Islamic caliphate sparked a wave of outcry from the Muslim clergy. Al-Afghani was an Avicennian and a follower of Ibn Arabi's unorthodox mysticism. He had acquired throughout his tumultuous life experience of the political world. He thus initiated Abduh to Avicenna and Ibn Arabi, and then became his teacher in political thought and international relations. Al-Afghani put it upon himself to awaken the minds of Muslims and tear them away from their passivity. But he was also an adventurer and a man of great ambition. His life was surrounded by great mysteries.

Al-Afghani first found in Abduh the scribe he needed to spread his ideas in the press. Abduh discovered, for his part, through al-Afghani, the world that had been obscured by the nature of al-Azhar's teaching. The two men therefore became friends, to the extent that, until today, it is uncommon to evoke one without the other. Abduh began his career as a teacher in a non-religious school, *Dar al-'ulum*, devoting one of his courses to the famous *Muqaddima* by Ibn Khaldun. When the *al-Ahram* newspaper was founded in 1876, al-Afghani encouraged his disciple to publish articles there. Later, Abduh was appointed editor of the Official Journal *al-Waqa'I al-Misriyya*. In this journal, he put in place a "general" section for articles on intellectual and social reforms. He thus succeeded in making this newspaper a forum for Islamic Reform.

A revolt broke out in 1882 under Ahmed Urabi, the highest-ranking Egyptian in an army controlled by a Turkish oligarchy.[2] Many Egyptian personalities joined him

[1] On the rather obscure life of al-Afghani, one can consult the biography published by Homa Pakdaman titled *Djamal ed-Din Assad Abadi dit Afghani*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 1969.

[2] Ahmad Urabi Pasha (1814–1911) is an Egyptian officer who led the revolt of Egyptian soldiers against the Turkish oligarchy that reigned in Egypt. The revolt failed after the British military intervention in 1882. He was exiled to Ceylon.

and the military rebellion quickly turned into an Egyptian patriotic revolt against the oligarchic power of the Khedives, and then turned against the British intervention. Abduh did not believe in a radical and revolutionary change, but he joined the insurgents when the Khedive Tawfiq decided to end the rebellion by force and called on England to intervene militarily. After the failure of the revolution led by Captain Urabi, Abduh was arrested and imprisoned for 3 months, after which he was sentenced to exile. He went to Beirut in 1883, then rejoined his master al-Afghani, who had been exiled before him and found refuge in Paris. The two men then published the magazine *Urwa al-Wuthqa* (the indissoluble bond). This publication had for editorial headquarters a dilapidated Parisian apartment. Never has a magazine had such a great influence in the Muslim world.

Due to lack of financial means and pressure from the British and Ottomans, the magazine ended after eighteen issues published in 8 months. Abduh then returned to Beirut in 1885 and started teaching there. He commented on works of rhetoric and logic and began to teach Muslim Theology according to a method and a spirit he wanted to modernize. These theological courses were later resumed in Egypt and were published under the title of *Risalat al-tawhid* (the Epistle on the Oneness of God, henceforth: R. Tawhid).

Abduh was only allowed to return to his country in 1889. Egypt was then under English rule. It is likely that to consolidate for his return, Abduh was forced to commit to not participating in political activities. But Abduh was also softened by his unfortunate experiences and those of his mentor, al-Afghani. He therefore decided to pursue education reform, but he did not manage to get a position of authority in this area. He had to be satisfied with the position of civilian judge outside Cairo. It was at this point that Abduh began to learn French, while he was in his forties. He attended summer school in Geneva. He translated a book by the philosopher Herbert Spencer from French into Arabic (originally published in English as *Education*).

In 1892, Khedive Tawfiq died and was succeeded by Khedive Abbas II. Abduh seized an opportunity to take on an important role in his country. Education in Egypt was divided into two areas: a "modern" sector controlled by the English and a religious sector controlled by the Khedive. Abduh had failed to convince the English to give him a place in modern establishments. He turned to Abbas II to lead the reform of the religious university of al-Azhar. His relations with the new Khedive improved for several years, so much so that Abduh was even named, in 1899, Grand *mufti* of Egypt.

This positive relationship did not last long, especially once relations between the British consul and the young Khedive deteriorated. Abduh refused to take sides in favor of one or the other, believing that both were foreigners in Egypt and that they should therefore restore sovereignty the day the Egyptians would be able to take care of themselves. This position was fatal for Abduh, and he was then accused of passive collaboration with the British occupier. Towards the end of his life, Abduh travelled to Tunisia and Algeria, both of which were under French rule. On these visits he defended the same attitude, namely the need to prepare for independence before embarking on political enterprises to acquire it.

This triggered a pitiless campaign against Abduh: all the reforms which he defended were accused of following a Western playbook. After trying to reform the Islamic courts, the *waqfs* (religious foundations), and worship services, he waged his last, fiercest battle to reform al-Azhar's mode of religious instruction. He only partially succeeded in imposing his program before being forced to resign from al-Azhar's board of directors in 1905. It was then that he discovered he had cancer. In the meantime, he had begun a commentary on the Qur'an which remained unfinished, but which opened a new path in Qur'anic exegesis. Abduh died in Alexandria on July 11th 1905, at the age of 56. His prestigious name and his controversial personality were by then well known throughout the Muslim world.

Several years after the death of Abduh, one of his followers, Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935), managed one of the most pernicious feats of modern Islam. He declared himself the heir of the reformist movement and endeavored to reshape it in a Wahhabi mold, depriving the movement of its own coherence and arresting its natural progression. Upon a similar impulse, his admirer Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949) founded, in 1928, the movement of the "Muslim Brotherhood," which became the urban version of the Bedouin Wahhabism of the Arabian Peninsula. As the Muslim caliphate was abolished in 1924, the alliance formed between Wahhabism and the Muslim Brotherhood has since captured the spiritual, legal, political and financial currents of Islam.

Modern Islam was initially contested by three major trends: a conservative tendency represented by traditional religious institutions, a fundamentalist tendency represented by Wahhabism, and a reformist tendency of liberal inspiration. Rashid Rida made a "coup de force" by fusing the last two tendencies to face the inertia of the first; the merger proved to be largely in favor of Wahhabism. This paved the way for the neo-fundamentalism of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The decisive moment of this "coup de force" took place precisely at the time of the publication of a monumental biography of Abduh, appearing in installments from 1905 to 1931, adding up to an imposing work of more than 2200 pages.[3] From the first page onwards, Rida flattered himself as having been the closest disciple of Abduh, the one who was instructed to spread his thought and wisdom. He also said he wrote this biography at the request of Muslims worldwide. Rida's account of the Abduh's collected works and the writing of his biography suffices to cast doubt on this claim. At the very least, it makes it possible to affirm that Rida was only laid claim as the closest disciple of Abduh several years *following* Abduh's death. This is a big claim. Being the Master's closest disciple was tantamount to assuming the right to his intellectual, spiritual, and political succession, to incarnate his supposed religious lineage, to take advantage of his notoriety, and to establish himself as the authority of reference in the posthumous debates on his ideas. Since Abduh's death, and even already during his lifetime, the terrain of competition has proved to be very rough.

[3] Rida Rashid, *Tarikh al-ustadh al-imam Muhammad Abduh*, Cairo, Publisher *al-Manar*, 3 vol.

Indeed, at the time of Abduh's death, a committee was formed to collect his works and write a biography in his memory. The committee gathered people who had been close to Abduh for a long time. It included Saad Zaghlul, an Egyptian politician who led the negotiations with the British for the evacuation of Egypt. Formerly al-Afghani's companion, he had become friends with Abduh since their collaboration on the editing of the newspaper *al-Waqa'i 'al-misriyya*. Shaykh Abd al-Karim Salman was also one of the members of this committee: as Abduh's companion at the religious university of al-Azhar, he had remained his friend and right arm during the attempts to reform this institution. Also worth citing here is the Shaykh Abd al-Raziq, father of Ali and Mustafa who will be discussed later, or Qasim Amin, author of the first call for the emancipation of Muslim women.

Rida's name was not on the list of members of this committee. It is therefore quite reasonable to doubt that Rida was considered from the beginning to be the custodian of Abduh's intellectual and spiritual heritage. Neither the family of the deceased nor most of his friends and disciples believed him to be. Rida was not invited to participate in the preparation of the funeral, to pronounce the funeral orations, nor to collect the works nor to write Abduh's biography at that time. It was only by fortunate coincidence that he was asked, long afterwards, to do so on behalf of the committee, whose members were then mobilized in the struggle for national liberation. They negotiated in the name of Khedive Abbas II, who did not like Abduh, and it was therefore in their interest to distance themselves from their former spiritual guide. Rida benefited from this pressure to take possession of all the documents collected by the committee.

Rida dragged out the publication of the biography, to the extent that it was completed only 26 years after Abduh's death! By that point, all of Abduh's friends and known relatives had passed away, including members of the committee, such as Qasim Amin (d. 1908), Abd al-Karim Salman (d. 1918) and Saad Zaghlul (d. 1927). Contrary to popular belief, Rida's biography of Abduh cannot be considered a collective work and it was never endorsed by members of the committee formed for that purpose. The committee commissioned a short biography in memory of Abduh; Rida wanted to write an imposing work on reform in modern Islam. One can only lament the naivety of the studies and books devoted to Abduh who refer to Rida's biography as if it were the direct testimony of his companions. There is another aspect that demands special attention. Between the date of Abduh's death and that of the publication of the biography (1905–1931), the political and cultural situation of Egypt and of the Muslim world in general had drastically changed. There had been heated debates on the caliphate, the emancipation of women, religious education, the primacy of the nation-state, the historical value of pre-Islamic poetry, etc. Many scholars who had been affected by Abduh's teaching were moving towards liberal political and cultural, while Rida regressed towards a Puritan *Salafism*.

Indeed, Rida looked elsewhere. In the Arabian desert, a cunning and tenacious leader had undertaken the task of unifying the Peninsula by resuming Wahhabi proselytism. His success was astounding: he snatched Mecca from the Hashemites in 1924, proclaimed himself King of Hijaz in 1926, and controlled much of the region

by 1932. In industrialized countries, oil eventually prevailed over coal. The desert, once uninteresting, became a strategic issue thanks to its main source which was known as "the black gold." The saga of Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud (1880–1953) corresponded to the gestation period of Abduh's biography. Rida came closer to Wahhabism and believed in the political and religious future of this movement. He had also discovered and revered Ibn Taymiyya's writings and those of his pupil, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. Abduh did not seem to have had access to these words; as for Wahhabism, he called it a fanatical movement and, moreover, had died long before the rise of its second state on the peninsula.

Wahhabism is a rigorous doctrine that was founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) and whose main principles go back to Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328). It had been condemned by the official religious institutions of the time, but had found wide echoes in its favor in the peripheries of Islam. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had found a valuable ally in Muhammad ibn Saud (1744–1765), leader of a powerful Najd tribe. A first Wahhabi State was created there, then quickly dissolved, in 1818, following an Egyptian intervention at the request of the Ottoman *caliph*. Later, the English had encouraged Wahhabism to punish the Hashemite dynasty that controlled the holy places of Islam. Abd al-Aziz took the opportunity to found a second Wahhabi state (present-day Saudi Arabia). To avoid the fate of the first, he had to calm the ardor of the hard fringe of the Wahhabis and came into several conflict with his leaders, but he did not question the alliance that the Saud family had formed with the Wahhabis in 1745; he left them the religious control of the state (which includes education and *hisba*, a kind of religious police). Ibn Saud was in competition with the Hashemites and the Khedives of Egypt for access to the caliphate, which had been vacant since 1924. But it was above all the exploitation of oil by American companies that allowed the new State to exercise henceforth a great religious and political influence.

Rashid Rida had therefore espoused the cause of the Sauds against that of the Hashemites. This was not, however, an exception. Amin al-Rayhani (1876–1940), a Maronite Christian, had left his home in New York to join King Abd al-Aziz in his desert and serve as secretary and biographer. Yet al-Rayhani had been one of the first Arab thinkers to openly criticize religions, and he was a great admirer of Shakespeare. Forced to leave his native Lebanon, he fled to the United States and obtained American citizenship. How is it possible that people of the stature of a Rashd Ridaa or Amin al-Rayhani could admire Wahhabism and support Ibn Saud' enterprise?

To answer this question, one would have to refer to the context of the time. A pan-Arab movement was born at the end of the nineteenth century in Greater Syria, which was composed of two tendencies: a secular liberal one and a religious reformist one. This movement was harshly repressed by the Ottomans, who were the official embodiment of the Islamic caliphate and who directly controlled the Arab provinces (except those of the Maghreb). The ideological differences within pan-Arabism were put aside in the face of repeated persecution and death sentences, to which many activists of this movement fell victim.

At the same time, the Hashemite family of the Hijaz dreamed of taking the leadership of the pan-Arab movement. The Ottoman Empire, as we know, had allied with Germany during the First World War. The English encouraged the Hashemites to revolt against this Empire to destabilize the Berlin-Istanbul axis, in exchange for a vague promise of recognition of an independent Arab state under the rule of the Hashemites once the war was over. The "Arab Revolt" broke out against the Ottoman Empire in 1916: it was led by Sherif Husayn, advised by the famous Lawrence of Arabia, and brought together Muslims and Christians from the Levant. However, once the war ended, the promises of an Arab state were not kept. The disappointment was such that the problems of reform and modernization seemed to be secondary. The goal for some of the Syro-Lebanese was to take revenge on the Ottoman Empire that had persecuted them, without counting again on a Europe that had fooled them. The Abd al-Aziz enterprise seemed to be giving new life to the pan-Arab movement. Abd al-Aziz was an Arab and an enemy of the Muslim caliphate; people like Rida did not know about his secret relationship with the British. As for his religious rigorism, al-Rayhani would have been the first to compare it with the Republic of Geneva founded by Calvin. Calvinism allowed the rise of the modern world by beginning a moral and religious dictatorship, but history tells us that he kept the principle of the republic and not the Calvinist morality. Why didn't the pan-Arab movement go through the same path?

Wahhabism's doctrinal aspects will be discussed later on, but the event-based history of this movement is itself questionable. Sources that speak of this movement are usually controversial treatises that should be consulted with care and awareness. Experts agree that the British Foreign Affairs Archive remains the most reliable source for this. Arab sources are highly questionable because they originate in the context of the passionate controversies aroused at that time. Even Amin al-Rayhani's accounts, which seem to be the most objective, have recently been questioned following the publication of correspondence suggesting that al-Rayhani was in contact with the American secret services. In fact, it is of little importance, as it does not matter that Rashid Rida took advantage of the Sauds to finance his printing works. The essential element lies elsewhere. After the First World War and following President Wilson's famous promises to respect peoples' aspirations for self-determination, the issues of reform and modernization were everywhere in the ether. The Arabs, like the other peoples of Asia and Africa, wanted first of all to gain their independence and to be recognized as having a national home. Liberalism was no longer deemed acceptable because it was tarred as the corollary of colonialism. Reformism was confused with attempts to save the Ottoman Turks dominated by the caliphate empire. The death knell of the liberal age came with in early 1930s. The *nahda* (renaissance) was substituted with the *thawra* (revolution).

This new state of mind, that of the time like that of Rida, had enormous repercussions for Abduh's biography. One wonders what Abduh's image would have been today had the committee entrusted the biography to the liberal Qasim Amin. He was a member of the committee, a friend of Abduh and the author, with Abduh's help, of the first pamphlet for the emancipation of the Muslim woman (1899). Instead, the

works of the most famous reformer of modern Islam have undergone all forms of manipulation. For example, Rida omitted dozens of Abduh's articles written on political topics. He omitted from *R. Tawhid* a paragraph in which Abduh defended the Mu'tazilite thesis of the created nature of the Qur'an. He permitted himself to comment on this text in ways that were often frankly opposed to its author's intentions and he continued the qur'anic commentary begun by Abduh but in a spirit contrary to reform. Moreover, Rida marginalized two of Abduh's major theological texts: a mystical text titled *Risalat al-Waridat* and an important theological treatise entitled *Ta'liqat ala sharh al-Dawwani*.

Worse yet, the postulates on which Rida built his vision of modern Islam and the problem of religious reformation have had a long life. Rida understood human history as an ongoing struggle between two poles, Truth and Error. Truth is the Word of God taught by the Prophets and re-actualized by the reformers. Rida therefore proposed a "chain" which placed Abduh among those who were sent every century to "revitalize" religion (according to a famous saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad). Abduh thus rubs shoulders with Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (101/717), Ahmad ibn Hanbal (241/855), Abu al-Hasan al-Ashari (324/936), Ibn Hazm al-Zahir (1063), Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1111), Ibn Taymiyya (652/1254) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (751/1350). However, while the first of those names is generally accepted among Sunnis, it is a different story for the others. The "chain" of reformers, as portrayed by Rida, gives pride of place to the "literalist" tendencies in the Muslim tradition: fanatical Hanbalism is by far the most represented. Rida has thus managed to wahhabize Islam's reformation, to the extent that his vision is explicitly or implicitly repeated in dozens of studies and indeed the prestigious Encyclopedia of Islam discussed above. Muhammad Umra in the Arab world and Tariq Ramadan in the Western world are today the continuation of this trend and the defenders of a liberal reform in favor of a neo-conservatism close to the doctrine of the Muslim Brotherhood.

2.2 Ibn Taymiyya vs. Avicenna and Ibn Arabi

A new reading of Abduh is not only possible, it is necessary. It should start with the rediscovery of texts that have been marginalized so far. It will reveal an even more liberal Abduh than we know. But above all, it will better highlight the opposition in modern Islam between liberal reformism and Wahhabi Salafism. The reformism that Rida "wahhabized" dominated throughout the twentieth century. His magazine *al-Manar* inspired institutional and activist Islam all at once. *Madrasat al-Irshad*, founded and led by Rida, was the model inspired by Hassan al-Banna, founder of the "Muslim Brotherhood" movement. As mentioned above, the alliance formed since the fall of the caliphate between Wahhabism from the Arab desert and its urban Muslim Brotherhood variant have dominated the political and spiritual orientation of Islam in the twentieth century. At the dawn of the new century, it is incum-

bent upon modern Islam to make a new start. It would be useful for it to begin with an "archeology of knowledge" and the questioning of the postulates and the "non-thought" that determined its orientations in the last century.

The texts of Abduh that authors from Rida to Umara have most marginalized – the writings from his youth – now must be examined. Admittedly, they are confusing for the modern reader. Far removed from modern rhetoric, they nevertheless contain a mass of useful data that compensate for the pain induced by reading them, provided that one takes the time. This factor doubtless added to the marginalization of these writings. The marginalized texts in question are the *Hashiya*, the *Risalat al-Warridat* (*R. Waldad*), the *Tafsir*, and the articles in the *al-Waqa'i* newspaper censored by Rida. The first of these, the *Hashiya*, also called *Ta'liqat*, is a set of glosses on the theological commentary of al-Dawwani (907/1502) of the statement of the faith of Adud al-Din al-Iji (756/1355). Completed in 1292/1876, it was probably only published for the first time at the end of Abduh's life (1904). Rida presents it in five lines in the biography, whereas 174 lines are dedicated to R. Tawhid, hinting once again that Abduh had ceased to profess the theses which are expressed there.

Nothing could be further from the truth, for Abduh himself insisted that this text be published before his death. He would have refrained from presenting problems of the faith again had he not been fully convinced of them. It is useful to know that Iji was the contemporary of Ibn Taymiyya. The two, however, had opposite political and theological positions. Iji dedicated his life to defend, consolidate, and renew the speculative Theology elaborated by the Greek Logos. He took advantage the Mongols' good will towards him to strengthen his doctrinal magisterium. His book, entitled *al-Mawaqif*, is the equivalent, in Sunni Islam, of Thomas Aquinas's *Theological Summa* in medieval Christianity. On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyya, who called for Jihad against the Mongols, devoted his life to destroying speculative Theology in favor of a fideist faith qualified as Salafism. It is no coincidence that al-Afghani and Abduh have chosen Iji's texts as a starting point for a critical revision of the Muslim theological tradition.

In fact, what disturbed Rida, and later M. Umara, was that this work allows us to situate the thought of its author in a line drawn by Ibn Sina and his commentators who adhere to the fusion of *kalam* (Theology) with *falsafa* (philosophy). In all of these cases, it was not a question of Salafi filiation, but the opposite. Indeed, everything contrasted this filiation with the school of Ibn Taymiyya and his disciples.

The first striking fact in this text is the author's new and bold definition of salvation. When commenting on a famous statement of Muhammad prophesying the break-up of his nation into many sects of which only one will remain faithful to him, Abduh pointedly refuses to identify the Asharite doctrine (the doctrine of the majority of Muslims) as the group guaranteed to salvation, thus opening a breach in the Sunni attitude accustomed to serenely proclaim this dogma for several centuries. He thus dissociates the salvation of the majority doctrine to maintain that the first can only be the result of a personal effort. We must take this thought in the strong sense: it is not a classic apology for *ijtihad* (personal effort), but rather a true individualiza-

tion of religious consciousness. Abduh completes this thought, admitting that any personal effort engaged in sincerity and the quest for Truth leads to salvation, whatever its doctrinal conclusions.

The second highlight of this text is Abduh's limitations upon the religious field. Faith is clearly differentiated from Theology, which is an uncommon position in the Muslim tradition. Faith is defined in a minimalist way and its sources are limited to Scripture. All religions overlap, according to Abduh – who takes up here an old idea of his mentor Jamal al-Din al-Afghani – around a small number of basic principles, which are moreover susceptible to multiple interpretations. However, interpretation is not a matter of faith, but of Theology. This is only a human thought; by desecrating it, Abduh opens the way to a freer exercise of religious experience. Above all he gives their foundation not only to the theological foundations of ecumenism within the Muslim tradition, but also to a dialogue between all religious traditions.

The third striking fact is the delimitation of the authority of the *cripturary datum*. Abduh defends three hermeneutical rules, which again have to be understood in the strongest sense. First, every text is written in a human language and is therefore susceptible of several interpretations (any sign is essentially polysemic, as we would say today); second, reason (reflection) is more important than recourse to the Scriptures; and third, reasoning is permitted on all subjects.

The important events that we have just outlined converge around the same axis, namely the individualization of religious consciousness.[4] This is all the more remarkable because the book was written before Abduh familiarized himself with Western thought. He was not then haunted by the desire to "embellish" the image of Islam to respond to the denigration of which it is victim, a concern that became apparent later in Abduh's writings. It is rather a truly spiritual conviction, elaborated within the Muslim tradition understood in its broadest sense.

From this work there emerges a theological construction at odds with conventional Salafism and the prevailing Asharite doctrine. Admittedly, Abduh's unacknowledged ambition was to establish the political union of Muslims based on the religious unity of Islam. However, instead of choosing the Wahhabi and the radical Islamist solution, which consists in excommunicating all versions of Islam considered impure, or the conservative solution, which consists of the union of Muslims on the creed of the majority, he proposed the most difficult – albeit more coherent – solution, even if his realization verged on utopia. Indeed, Abduh believed he was able to sift through reason all the theological knowledge bequeathed by the totality of religious traditions and doctrinal schools in order to better identify the 'truths' and wisdoms that are shared by impartial minds.

[4] For more information, consult our book published in Arabic (*The religion of the individual conscience*), op. cit. to note 1.

2.3 Ecumenical Solutions

In order to appreciate Abduh's enterprise at its true worth while acknowledging its epistemological improbability, there is no better way than to compare our author's openness to the situation that the majority of theologians had imposed on Muslims since the sixth century of the Hegira/twelfth century C.E.: *iljam*, a reference to al-Ghazali's famous work, *Iljam al-awamm an ilm al-kalam*. We know that the condemnation of philosophy by theologians was the crucial moment of the eclipse of rationality and tolerance in Muslim civilization. Al-Ghazali became famous with his book *Tahafut al-falasifa* (T*he Inconsistency of Philosophers*), in which he condemned philosophy and accused philosophers of ungodliness due to their three theses: (1) the pre-eternity of the universe, (2) the denial of the divine knowledge of individuals, and (3) the negation of bodily resurrection.[5] It would be interesting to probe Abduh's positions on these three respective subjects which, if they have lost all interest for the modern reader, nonetheless aroused many controversies and struggles among not only medieval theologians and Muslims, but also Christians and Jews.

Abduh, who seems to have always believed in the eternity of matter, does not reject the hypothesis that the universe is pre-eternal, even if he believes that the classical hypothesis of a world created *ex nihilo* is more likely. In any case, he has always considered it possible to believe in God, regardless of the position taken on this problem. This attitude is in total opposition to the idea, in vogue from al-Ghazali to the "late" theologians, that the creation of the universe is a condition *sine qua non* for faith in God.[6] According to Abduh, this is not a question of faith, but rather remains subject to argumentation. There was, therefore, no reason to excommunicate the philosophers who defended the thesis of the pre-eternity of the universe.[7]

As ambiguous as it may be, his position on divine science is nonetheless open and tolerant. Once again, he refuses to excommunicate competing solutions that define divine science as a general science or as a knowledge of individuals. Abduh was aware of the difficulties facing the second as well as the dangerous implications of the first: he seems to have hesitated to settle this debate. What he did not do was condemn the followers of one or the other thesis. On the other hand, his position on the third question regarding bodily resurrection proves to be less hesitant.[8] It can be

[5] The debate on this kind of subject had fascinated the three monotheists in the medieval age. See Gilson Etienne, *Philosophy of the Middle Ages*, Payot, 1999; By Libera Alain, *Medival Philosophy*, P.U.F., 1993, and *De unitate intellectus contra averroistas* by Thomas Aquinas, Vrin, 2004.

[6] For a summary and classic overview of the problems of Muslim Theology, we refer the reader to Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction to Muslim Theology*, Vrin, 1970.

[7] The theological positions of Abduh are expounded in the *Hashiya* or *Ta'liqat*. We use here the edition of Sulayman Dunya, Cairo, 1958.

[8] Abduh seems to have largely drawn from the *Risala al-ma'ad* (Treatise on the Bodily Resurrection) of Ibn Sina (Avicenna). Avicenna's text was edited by S. Dunya, Cairo, 1949.

said without much risk of self-deception that Abduh did not really believe in such a resurrection. He seems to faithfully repeat Ibn Sina's teaching: the soul, unalterable essence, leaves the body after death to rejoin its original universe, and it alone can be the object of a return. It must also be added that this is not a resurrection in the strict sense, but a return to the "sublunary" world. The body is a corruptible matter that cannot access this world. As for the material images by which religions present the resurrection, they should be interpreted in an allegorical manner, because they would be only fictitious images presented for educational purposes: if they are necessary for the teaching of the common believers they should not be taken literally by scientists.

It is clear from these three questions that Abduh is more the heir of Ibn Sina than the disciple of Ibn Taymiyya or al-Ghazali. However, it is possible go further in this demonstration, because Abduh's openness is manifested well beyond these several issues. Indeed, a certain form of monism passes through all the chapters of the *Hashiya*, as well as from *R. Waridat*. According to Abduh, the basic equation is: Divinity = Existence (the principle of all mysticism of Ibn Arabi!). As a result, he refuses to separate God and the universe, the act of God and the act of man, the divine will and the laws of nature, etc.

The second of Abduh's occult writings is *R. Waridat*, a spiritual epistle directly inspired by the greatest mystic of Islam, the Doctus maximus (al-Shaykh al-Akbar) Muhyi al-Din ibn Arabi (1105–1240). This epistle was written in 1874 and published for the first time in 1908 in the second volume of the Bibliography. Rida then decided to omit it from the second edition, contenting himself with publishing it in the form of a reprint. This decision does not seem to be devoid of ulterior motives, because a reprinted edition in limited circulation falls more easily into oblivion than a text incorporated into a reference work. Worse still, the epistle was originally entitled *Risalat al-warridat si sirr al-tajalliyat* (literally: "Treatise on Inspiration on the Secrets of Revelations"). Rida renamed it *Risalat al-waridat fi nazariyyat al-mutakallimin wa-l-sufiyya fi l-falsafa l-ilahiyya* ("Treatise on Inspirations on the Opinions of Theologians and Mystics in Matters of Theosophy"), implying that the opinions expressed therein are not Abduh's opinions and that he is only the rapporteur.

R. Waridat proposes a rather indigent and naive cosmogonic system, but one that is very useful to show the debt of Abduh's thought towards mystical philosophy. Here is the general architecture: the culminating point of the universe is, logically, the necessary Being; he "supervises" the universe of the Intellects which, in turn, directs the universal spirits responsible for composition (*khalq*), life, knowledge, and death (= decomposition). These functions lead us to the borders of the "sublunary" world, or, to use Abduh's expression, the world of pure bodies. The opposite world, the sphere below, is the world of matter. Its culminating point is the raw material (*hayula*) which gives rise to the three modes of life: the human, the animal, and the vegetable, which, moreover, are degrees of existence and not independent entities, which allowed Abduh to argue later that Darwin's famous theory of the origin of species was in no way incompatible with Islam.

This cosmogonic system testifies to the distance that still separated Muslims in the nineteenth century from modern science and philosophy. However, this system involves bold theological consequences, such as the impossibility of bodily resurrection, which is one of the dogmas of literal Islam. As has already been pointed out, philosophers like Ibn Sina and mystics like Ibn Arabi consider that the soul alone can join the world of pure bodies. Punishments and rewards, scenes of "torture" inflicted on the disbelievers, or "virgins" promised to good believers, for example, must be interpreted in an allegorical sense, since they cannot have material reality.

Another consequence stems inevitably from this cosmogony: Abduh willingly envisages the idea of a prophecy without descending revelation. For him, prophecy is a predisposition, as well as a lucidity of mind which makes it possible to apprehend the truth without intermediary (that is to say without reasoning). In any case, he refuses the idea of a "descent" which would imply a total passivity of the receptive intelligence of the prophet. On the contrary, it is this intelligence that experiences an ascent to the world of pure bodies. In this case, the revelation would be only the unveiling of this world.[9]

Is it possible to draw another consequence, or simply the effect of common sense of contradicting all the dominant thought in Islam concerning the dogma of the "uncreated" character of the Qur'an? Abduh has never been so categorical; he not only refuses this dogma, but he insists on the median thesis, once proposed by the Asharite doctrine, of an "internal" word (*kalam nafsi*). Adopting the Mu'tazilite point of view, Abduh unambiguously argues that the Qur'an is created.[10] We must recall that the absolutist thesis of the "uncreated" character of the Qur'an constitutes the foundation of its literalist exegesis and excludes any possibility of subjecting the Qur'anic corpus to philological inquiry.

We are therefore very far from the predominant portrayal of Abduh, both in the Encyclopedia of Islam and in the representations given by Umara or Tariq Ramadan. Is it still acceptable to say that "while the impulses it received from the liberal Western thought are undeniable, its doctrines have their deepest roots, in the first lines, in the conservative-reformer of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and in the ethico-religious conceptions of al-Ghazali"? The mistake is clear: it is not on the side of the West, and even less so on the side of the current Salafism, that we must locate the influences. Indeed, another filiation altogether is more legitimate: the thought of Ibn Sina, transmitted through mystical commentators, which arrived at Abduh thanks to al-Afghani, the great apostle of what was wrongly called modern Salafism and which should rather be called militant spiritualism. Al-Afghani and Abduh (and, in his own way, Abdelkader the Algerian) are the initiators.

[9] Cf. *Hashiya*, p. 209 and *R. Waridat*, p. 17. Like Ibn Sina, Abduh tries here to "rationalize" the phenomenon of prophecy.

[10] Cf. *Hashiya*, p. 584.

2.4 Silencing That Which One Cannot Discuss

At this point in the presentation, the following objection could be made. Why trust obscure epistles rather than *R. Tawhid* (it must be remembered that this treatise is the only one fully available in European languages)? Doesn't this famous render obsolete all the earlier positions taken by its author? This is the second big mistake. *R. Tawhid* is indeed often referred to as "the essential theological work" of Abduh. But this way of thinking is not the result of a comparative study of several texts, but rather the echo of a judgment long imposed by Rashid Rida, who devoted in the inventory of Abduh's works 174 lines for *R. Tawhid* compared to 5 lines for *Hashiya*, and had published the first work about 20 times during his lifetime, while omitting *R. Waridat* from the compilation of Abduh's works. It has already been treated in the historical aspect of this affair. But we must also answer this objection from another angle. For this objection to be valid, it is necessary to find in *R. Tawhid* (or the *Commentary of the Qur'an*) remarks which contradict the positions defended in the previous texts (previous because of the date of their writing, but posterior, in fact, regarding the publication dates). Is this really the case?

It is sufficient to repeat one by one Abduh's positions that have already been exposed and to make a comparison with *R. Tawhid*. Pre-eternity of the universe? Divine knowledge of individuals? Bodily resurrection? Abduh carefully avoids these problems. Could it be because he changed his mind in the meantime? Such an assumption is absurd, given the nature of these issues. Indeed, these touch on faith and belief, and this made the obligation to profess "just" opinions more pressing. If Abduh failed to do this, it simply did not change his mind. In fact, he only estimated, which appears to be logical, that they are delicate questions that cannot be debated outside the circles of specialists. Moreover, we often forget that *R. Tawhid* is only a summary of courses given to young beginners in a school in Beirut, then published and commented in a public lecture at al-Azhar. Abduh made sure not to include top-level developments that, in addition to surpassing the capabilities of this audience, would be unwelcome.

As for the problem of punishment? This is also a moderately evaded problem in *R. Tawhid* and the Qur'anic Commentary. It was thought in this attitude that the author's desire was not to oppose the modern mentality, which was not inclined to this kind of reflection. This explanation is not to be rejected, but it does not communicate the essential truth because Abduh's silence is the consequence of an old mystical attitude: to discuss subjects according to the ability of the receivers to understand them.

As for the dogma of the "uncreated" character of the Qur'an? Abduh expressed this well in *R. Tawhid*, and cannot have been more explicit: "He who says that the Qur'an one reads is uncreated is in the vilest state and professes an error larger than all the doctrines that the Qur'an itself refuted and engaged us to fight." However,

Rida omitted this passage in subsequent editions of the book, giving the impression that Abduh had retracted this statement or changed his view on subject![11]

As for his conception of prophecy? It should be pointed out here that Abduh sets out two definitions of revelation in *R. Tawhid*: the first is introduced by an indefinite pronoun (*arrafu-hu*…, "it has been defined") and the second by a personal pronoun (*amma nahnu fa-nu'arrifu hu*…, "as for us, we define it"). The form reflects in itself an opposition, a clear differentiation between a canonical definition and a definition of avicennial inspiration. The definition that Abduh adopts is: "(Revelation) is an illuminative knowledge (*irfan*) which man finds in himself, with the certainty that this knowledge comes from God, with or without intermediary." Are we not faced with an attenuated formulation, let us even say expeditiously, of the idea that we had already encountered better developed in the *Hashiya*, which is the work best suited to this kind of development?[12]

It should be noted, moreover, that in his commentary on the Qur'an, Abduh proposed to take in an allegorical sense the notion of *tanzi*l or *nuzul* (descent): this will return in the discussion of his commentary. As for the monism present in the works of which we have spoken, it often appears in the background of *R. Tawhid*, for the reasons which have already been explained, and is sometimes even explicitly mentioned in certain places. To be aware of this, it is necessary to read attentively some passages in the original Arabic and not the translation of B. Mitchell and M. Abd al-Raziq, which, as J. Jomier quite rightly pointed out, often gives priority to the excellence of style and not to the transposition of nuances and the complexity of the words.

Thus, there is no evidence to suggest that Abduh changed any of his positions, as there is no evidence that *R. Tawhid* is "the capital theological work," although it is certainly the most famous work. Moreover, one might even suggest that it is not really a theological work in the strict sense of the term; it should rather be classified as a religious education textbook written for the use of students from a school in Beirut, then commented in a public lecture at the mosque of al-Azhar. In both cases, *R. Tawhid* did not speak to insiders.

If the Muslim conscience has given preference to this work, it is perhaps because it remains more relevant to faith issues than to those of spiritual meditation. It refuses, or anyway does not formulate, the division that Abduh introduced between

[11] Compare the edition of *Bulaq* (Cairo, 1315/1898, p. 28) published during the lifetime of Abduh and the later editions published by the printing press *al-Manar*.

[12] We should be wary, and we insist, of falling into the other extreme. Indeed, some superficial writings and some authors, for whom the richness of the religious tradition in Islam is largely unknown, go quickly to task, taxing Abduh with impiety for his opinions. This is the case of some Islamists (ie. Sayyid Qutb or Gaili Tawba) and some Western writers (ie. E. Kedourie, al-Afghani and Abduh. *An essay on religion unbelief and political activism in modern Islam*, London, 1966). In fact, Abduh is the repository of a rich philosophical and spiritual tradition, namely Avitecnism and so-called illuminative mysticism. Our purpose is simply to show that it was precisely from this tradition that he was inspired not by Salafism or Asharite Theology.

these two domains because it is alienated from its tradition, claiming it ideologically while disregarding its wealth. In fact, a method initially developed with pedagogical intent to meet the needs of the general public has become widespread, as though the intellectual horizon of the majority of Muslims should be reduced to the level of a school in Beirut. It cannot be said enough: to read Abduh is not only a necessary step to render him justice, it should above all be a way for the criticism of contemporary Islamic reason.

2.5 The Primacy of the Moral Function

It is also necessary to review another part of Abduh's writings which have also been manipulated: the articles published in the newspaper *al-Waqa'i.* It has been said that some of these articles were censored by Rida.[13] These articles reveal a political and moral thought deeply imbued with the liberalism that characterized the nineteenth century.

Fundamentalism today lays claim to the application of the Shariah. However, Abduh wanted a State based on the rule of law. According to him, this passed through the exploration of a kind of universal morality. It does not matter whether it is in the name of religion or of reason, whether we rely on Miskawayh or on Spencer, whether we refer to Ibn Khaldun or to Guizot. The essential according to Abduh was to demonstrate the existence of moral principles commonly accepted by all. He went even further, in a pre-Copernican language which recalls the moralists of the medieval age: he maintained that the principles of morality were the principles of the cosmos itself. According to Abduh,

> By observing the sublunary universe with all the spheres it contains, of suns and moons, then meditating on the lower universe and the plants and animals it contains, one will not fail to conclude that everything is governed by the same Law. If a species departs from its place in the universe, it is condemned to annihilation. Divine wisdom has dictated that the human species be governed by rules which map out to each of its members its course of action. These rules are set forth in the ethical works of philosophers, detailed in the sacred books of religions and confirmed by the past and present experiences of peoples.[14]

Yet man could do without the philosophies, ethics, and experiences of history and find the basic principles of morality in his inner self and in his spontaneous consciousness. The Qur'an only confirms this consciousness; the Qur'anic morality expresses it by recourse to the two notions of *ma'ruf* (the good, the admitted) and *munkar* (the evil, the blameworthy) and rests fundamentally on the *fitra* (the natural disposition). The morality of Abduh is very close to a "conquest of happiness," according to the expression of the philosophers and moralists of classical Islam. In many of his articles, we find the term *sa'ada* (happiness, happiness) detached from

[13] Articles are listed in Umara Muhammad, *al-Amal al-kamila* (Complete works), 6 vol., Beirut, 1973–1974.

[14] Cf. 'Umara, *al-Amal al-kamila*, op. cit., t. I, pp. 285–286.

any idea of corporal punishment or rewards. Happiness is rather presented as a surpassing of oneself to serve an ideal or, even better, the sacrifice of immediate interest for enduring interest. Humans are not called upon to passively adhere to imposed norms, they must rather think more deeply about what constitutes their interest. Abduh's perception of the relationship between Man and the universe and that between the soul and the body could only reinforce his sense of contempt for the immediate: it is by surpassing themselves that humans achieve perfection. Man does not consent to a sacrifice in exchange for a reward. Rather, he/she realizes his/her essence and thus adheres to the movement of the cosmos which is that of a rise from the bottom to the top and an ascent of ephemeral existences towards the true existence.

Abduh wrote the articles of *al-Waqa'i* at the very moment when he was teaching at Tah al-ulum the *Tahdhib al-Akhalq of Miskawayh*. It was from Miskawayh, a great Muslim humanist from the fourth/tenth century, that he borrowed this vocabulary and these analyses. Later on, he felt comforted in his thoughts by coming into contact with Tolstoy, for whom he held a great admiration.[15]Morality does not spring exclusively from religion; the latter, however, has an important role, since it is the best able to lead the common people on the path of virtue. As Abduh put it, "Human reason alone cannot lead to the happiness of this world, except for a few exceptional men who did not give us the names, those whose names are very few throughout the centuries."[16]

In short, Abduh wanted to give primacy, in religion, to its moral function, and he intended to reduce metaphysics and instead insist on ethics. It was an attempt to reconcile Islam with the modern age, even if it remained in an embryonic state. According to him, morality is not "universal" because it is dictated by religion, and it is religion that reinforces a morality which the wisest men define on their own accord. The mysticism of Abduh largely explains this state of mind. Abduh had familiarized himself very early on with al-Ghazali and his masterful work, the *Ihya ulum al-Din*, which was a kind of revolution against the hegemony of jurists and literalists in the Muslim city. After meeting al-Afghani, Abduh's mysticism took on more daring features, to the extent that he claimed to read as a novel *al-Futuhat ibn al-Makkiyya* by Ibn Arabi, a huge mystical encyclopedia written in an esoteric style difficult to access. Another factor to be taken into consideration is his encounter with Western thought, especially with that of Herbert Spencer, initiator of a kind of naturalistic morality. Abduh translated into Arabic (from a French translation) one of the books on education. It is also necessary to mention Tolstoy, the shattering Russian reformer, who, far ahead of Hans Küng, had called for the unity of religions on the basis of universal ethical principles.

[15] See Arkoun Mohamed, *Arab humanism in the IV-X centuries: philosopher et historian Miskawayh,* Vrin, 1982.

[16] Cf. *Risalat al-tawhid*, op. cit., p. 54.

2.6 A "Moral" State or a Theocratic State?

Medieval Muslim ethics regarded politics as the noblest level of morality, in parallel with Theology, which is the highest level of metaphysics. Abduh has largely taken up this vision. The moralist does not, according to him, interfere in the daily management of the city, because it is up to him to dictate the major orientations of ethics. The ideal city is one that sees all its members behave in solidarity and help each other to achieve collective happiness, each staying in his place. The politician carries out his mission and the moralist exposes morality, but the first listens to the second and is inspired by his advice in the management of the city.

Abduh's morality was based on efficiency, as he was influenced by the liberal utilitarianism of the nineteenth century. Since "reason" is an elite affair, religion remains, for him, the best instrument of public morality. "Why look elsewhere?" he repeated several times. What would remain is to carry out the necessary religious reform, namely an updating of values and codes of conduct according to the new requirements of the city. Remaining in the wake of medieval ethics and a utilitarian conception, Abduh could not go so far as to resort to human understanding in the education of peoples. He was neither a Lessing nor a Kant.

It is also, according to him, up to the State, as the grand master of education, to take charge of public morality. Indeed, teaching has the task of transmitting both knowledge and values. It is thus the best area for any reform that would endeavor to reshape the whole. Abduh has always opposed the idea of a theocratic state: even the *caliph* and the *qadi* (canonical judge) were, for him, mere mortals who fulfill civil functions (*de hukm madani*).[17] However, the state is obliged to preserve and promote morality. The state is the incarnation of the popular will but limited by the observation of moral values and ethical codes that are not the responsibility of the masses. If the state, in Islam, is not a theocracy, it is not a democracy either. Abduh was in favor of personal liberty and freedom of expression, because his "hidden" writings testify that, very early on, he had denounced the excesses of state intervention and personalization of power. Nonetheless, the central notion of his political thought was rather that of "justice."

As Oliver Roy rightly pointed out, "state excess" in the Western and Muslim political arenas is not of the same caliber and does not engender the same reactions.[18] State excess in the West takes the form of totalitarianism. It is not surprising then that political thought in the West is centered on freedom, since it consists of a reflection on totalitarianism. The weakness of the political space, in the proper sense, makes it that state excess in societies of Muslim culture manifests itself in the form of arbitrary violence and social injustice. The motto is then that of "justice" rather than "freedom," that of morality of the people rather than that of autonomy of the individual.

---

[17] Abduh Muhammad, *al-Islam wa al-nasraniyya bayna al-ilm wa al-madaniyya* (Islam and Christianity between science and civilization), Ed. Alger, 1990, p. 57.

[18] Cf. Roy Olivier, *The Failure of Political Islam*, Seuil, 1992, p. 24.

But beware: a guardian state and guarantor of morality is different than a state based on religious law (Shariah). Religion has always been, in the Muslim world, the means used by victims of injustice to claim rights and dignity. The Prince's arbitrariness could only be limited by the use of a force, so effective in the collective imagination, of God himself. For Abduh, religion is one of the victims of tyranny and therefore cannot be its auxiliary. This perception is difficult to understand from the representation we have of the Medieval Age, which was bequeathed by the political philosophies of the Enlightenment. The Medieval Age is, according to this representation, an age of darkness with tyrants and clerks as pillars. Abduh's point of view can be better understood by thinking of what happened more recently in the ex-communist countries: far from presenting a force of oppression, religion was rather perceived as a victim of violence and a way to fight oppression. For Abduh, religion is not the opium of peoples, but rather the only means they have to guard against the arbitrariness of princes.

Abduh could not yet see that modernity had invented an even safer way to escape this arbitrariness, namely democracy. This notion had not yet really penetrated the Arab-Muslim thought in its time. Of course, everyone knew that European countries were countries of freedom, but Muslims had their own grid of reading and saw the social state of Europe as resulting from the successful application of justice, since Europe was governed by constitutions and legislative bodies. Abduh also saw it that way; the idea of democracy, as well as that of secularization, remained more or less vague and incomprehensible to him.

Abduh suspected, however, that something had changed in the world. Indeed, he described the history of humanity as having gone through three cycles. The first cycle is that of nature, man having no other concern than to seek to satisfy his basic needs. Driven by the instinct of preservation that brought him to ask for help and support for his fellows, he inaugurated a second cycle, that of sociability. Finally, he has succeeded in perfecting science and knowledge and learning to reason by virtue of the general interest: this is the cycle of civilization. Abduh felt that Muslim societies had barely entered this last cycle and that it took time for them to reach the level of civilization of the West. Thus, in his opinion, it was necessary to envisage intermediate regimes before applying Western democracy in its entirety.

He thought that each Muslim country could follow its own evolution while keeping in mind that it was part of a Muslim community that must remain in solidarity. In other words, Abduh demanded the unity of the Muslim community, but did not want a theocratic state. He was, moreover, hostile to nationalism which he accused of populism. According to him, power is to be put neither in the hands of tyrants nor in those of clerics; the former end up practicing injustice and power grabbing, and the latter are incapable of managing public affairs. Power is not to be put in the hands of the masses. The ideal lies in a collegial leadership of the affairs of the state, provided by an enlightened elite; this would be the modern substitute for what the Qur'an and medieval thought called the *ul-l-amr* ("those who hold the decisions"). In sum, Abduh was in favor of a constitutional monarchy that would allow a liberal government and a representative assembly of the elite to manage society according

to what is supposed to correspond to its best interests and as part of a general morality to which everyone can and must submit – rulers and ruled, elite and mass, poor and rich.

2.7 What To Do with "Muslim Law"?

In Abduh's morality, there is no room for what radical Islamism calls the application of Shariah (religious law). Moreover, Abduh rarely uses the vocabulary of classical Islamic law. He classified each act of human behavior according to a scale of five qualifications: the obligatory (*wajib*), the forbidden (*haram*), the recommended (*mandib*), the reprehensible (*makruh*) and the permitted (*mubah*). Abduh gives up the qualifications for which he has no interest. According to him, religion is a path that leads to morality and not to law. This is the state of evolution of society. If Abduh opposes the introduction of positive European law in Muslim societies in its entirety, it is because he believes that these societies have not yet reached the level of European civilization. Abandoning corporal punishment for mere prison sentences will, in his view, only increase crime in contexts of misery where prisons may be more comfortable to criminals than their own home.

For Abduh, the Qur'an proposes a morality and the term *fiqh* (improperly translated as "Islamic law") means a thorough reading of the Qur'an and not a legal discipline. Al-Ghazali, in his famous book *Ihya ulum al-din* (The Revival of the Sciences of Religion) had already denounced the semantic shift that allowed Islamic jurists to be part of the religious management of the city. Abduh takes over the crusade against them, because he judges them responsible for the degradation of moral thought in Islam. He blames them for their formalism, their exaggerated attention to useless details, the great variation of their behavior, the little they thought of the evolution of societies, etc.

Designated *mufti* of Egypt in 1889, Abduh saw himself as a jurist. He took the opportunity to issue several fatwas, some of which had a great impact and aroused great controversy. One of the most famous examples is "The fatwa of the Transvaal," which allowed Muslims to consume the meat slaughtered by non-Muslims and wearing Western clothes.[19] A preliminary observation is needed here to clarify the scope of this legal opinion. In the medieval age, societies were stratified according to community and religious affiliations. The consumption of kosher or halal meat allowed a social group to distinguish itself from the others. Dress was also a sign of community belonging. Thus, Muslims, like others, wanted to distinguish themselves by ostentatious signs and strict rules on the slaughter of animals. Should Muslims keep this attitude in the modern world and refuse to integrate socially, especially when they live in a state of minority? On two occasions Abduh con-

[19] A large part of Abduh's fatwas has been collected in *al-Amal al-kamila*, op. cit., t. VI.

fronted this question; he delivered a fatwa decreeing the lawfulness of eating and dressing like non-Muslims, Jews or Christians to a Muslim in the Transvaal (South African province) and to a group of Muslims in India. Abduh, who responded to Muslims from minority communities, based his opinion on the principle of Muslim integration into predominantly non-Muslim societies, allowing the exemption of visible signs of religiosity when necessary for a successful social cohabitation.

On Polygamy: when Abduh was a young editor of the newspaper *al-Waqa'i*, he published a long article which, without directly blaming polygamy, emphasized the disastrous consequences of this practice in the social life of Muslims (March 8, 1881). While the Muslim religion permits polygamy, it also creates the condition of practicing fairness in the treatment of wives. According to Abduh, this condition could be fulfilled at the time of the prophet Muhammad and his virtuous companions, but it was not being observed by Abduh's own Muslim contemporaries. For him, polygamy had become a factor of decomposition of the family fabric: daily quarrels, conspiracy between parents, child abuse, repeated repudiations and divorces, injustice towards the poorest of wives, etc. Abduh asked himself: How can poor wives assert their right to equity under such conditions? Only a minority of families could fulfill the conditions set by the Qur'an, but the vast majority of men marry several women by mere sexual addiction.

Abduh, who was never married to more than one woman at a time, came back to the issue later, with the authority of *mufti*. He asserts, then, that Islam did not take the initiative of polygamy: it was a common practice in many civilizations of the time and Islam in fact imposed limits and conditions upon it. The crucial question turned on whether it was possible to enact a prohibition of polygamy in present times. Abduh answered without hesitation in the affirmative, making three arguments. Firstly, polygamy is allowed only on the condition of fairness in the treatment of wives, so permission is no longer granted if the condition is not respected. Second, temporal (i.e. civil) authority is entitled to intervene to prohibit polygamy from the moment it becomes clear that the condition of fairness is no longer met by a majority of Muslims. Third, the higher value of the family outweighs the permission of polygamy, and it is established that polygamy has become a factor in the disintegration of the family, so that the public or religious authorities have the right to forbid polygamy except in major cases which must then be approved by a judge, as in the case of women proving to be sterile.

Abduh may not have been the first Muslim to openly call for the prohibition of polygamy, but he was the first *mufti* to do so – and probably the last! Polygamy, although almost nonexistent in societies today, remains a sword of Damocles brandished against insubordinate women. Only Atatürk and Bourguiba dared to forbid it by the force of law, and no *mufti* has yet taken the risk of taking over Abduh's fatwa. Moreover, there are few legal opinions issued in this sense by the recognized *faqihs* (a legal opinion worth less than an official fatwa). One notable exception is the Moroccan Muhammad Allal al-Fassi (1910–1974) who, using other arguments, joined Abduh in his position. Rarely followed by the *faqihs*, Abduh's legal opinion

nevertheless made its way by force of evidence. Intellectuals have popularized it, often at their expense, such as the Egyptian Qasim Amin, influenced and helped by Abduh himself, and Tunisian Tahar Haddad.

On the visual arts: In March 2007, the Egyptian intelligentsia was shocked to learn that the *mufti* of Egypt, the Shaykh Ali Gomaa, had issued a fatwa prohibiting Muslims from owning statues, even to adorn inside their homes. According to this fatwa, which bears the reference 68/2007, anyone who owns and keeps a statue at home is suspected of "associationist" inclination (*shirk*) and may one day be tempted to worship the idol as a God! Although Egypt suffered at the same time an avalanche of ridiculous fatwas, this was truly a fatwa from another age: no one prays anymore to the *asnam* (statues) that Islam once combatted in its early days. But this time, it was the official *mufti* who made headlines with this legal opinion. Must we then destroy the pharaonic remains, dismantle the statues of Egyptian leaders in public places and condemn sculptors and visual artists to death? The liberal press referred to this opinion as the "Taliban fatwa," because of the Taliban's decision in 2000 to destroy Buddhist effigies in Afghanistan. To justify himself, the *mufti* recalled that he was merely repeating a legal opinion issued by one a predecessor in 1960. The astonishment grew when defenders of the *mufti* published similar opinions issued by two other major religious authorities of contemporary Islam: Shaykh Ibn Baz, former *mufti* of Saudi Arabia, and Yusuf Qaradawi, President of the powerful world association of Islamic scholars.

Yet one century earlier, the *mufti* of Egypt, none other than Muhammad Abduh, had issued an opposite fatwa which states, in essence, that there is no longer any risk of worshiping statues or to associate them with God, and that there is no reason, therefore, to maintain the prohibition to use them to adorn the houses or to make other uses. Muslims, on the contrary, need to be inspired by the West and erect effigies in public places to remember the historical contribution of the great figures of the nation. There is no better than this original example to show the deep regression that the Muslim fatwa experienced a century after Abduh!

On financial interests: Abduh also distinguished himself with a legal opinion which is still in the minority among religious scholars. By virtue of this opinion, bank loans are allowed on the basis of the distinction between *riba* (usury) and *fa'da* (interest). More specifically, Abduh has issued several opinions dealing with the legality of mutuals, insurance (including life insurance), and financing loans for commercial or agricultural activities. Abduh understood that the modern economy was becoming impossible without this distinction and without this principle of lending money.

2.8 A Commentary for the Century

The most important area in which Abduh's desire to give primacy to morality is expressed was, without a doubt, his commentary on the Qur'an. Abduh wanted to make the Qur'an an impetus for morality and a criterion for good behavior. Rather

than gloating over the comments of the elders, he tried to draw the consequences of a situation that Jamal al-Din al-Afghani had described with a provocative expression: "The Qur'an is still a virgin, no one has commented on it yet." This is the very expression that is repeated in the bound editions of Qur'anic commentary titled *al-Manar*.

Like other religions, the Muslim tradition rested on theology and exegesis. Theology is a group exercise: the theologian's effort is directed towards argumentation and content is advanced, although it can be argued that any effort to "update" theological arguments has often involved questioning some aspects of the creed to which the group adheres. The elaboration of the rationality of faith – that is the goal of all theology – is accompanied by the construction of a language that is meant to be logical and universally acceptable.

It is different for exegesis, which instead establishes a direct relation between the commentator and a text sacred to the group. Admittedly, it is also an exercise under tight control, but the nature of the exegetical effort is that the freedom enjoyed by the exegete is greater than that enjoyed by the theologian; at least that is what we see in Islam. Muslim Theology has been strongly influenced by Aristotelian logic, while the Qur'anic commentary, *tafsir*, has been a more spontaneous exercise, especially among grammarians. "Faith thus reasoned" in the medieval and scholastic Muslim tradition rested on these two pillars, which complemented each other and were self-regulating. Modern Muslim thought, on the other hand, is dormant, since it no longer has a theology worthy of the name. Classical theology, which was constructed from Greek logic and metaphysics, has fallen into disuse, and no modern substitute for this theology has yet emerged. Exegesis reigns henceforth alone and occupies the whole space of thought, to the point of exerting a total hegemony over the faithful who think to enter, through it, in direct relation with the "uncreated" divine Word.

Abduh's idea was, at first, to open a large theological construction site in order to sift through the data of the confessional traditions and to arrive at a sort of Theology of unity which is imposed solely by the strength of reasoning. Having realized later on the extent, if not the utopian character, of such an undertaking, he contented himself with a minimalist theology, which he expounded in *R. Tawhid*. This theology should silence the controversies to reconcile the sects, on the one hand, and grant between them faith and reason, on the other hand. The little importance granted to theology was thus counterbalanced by a more important given to exegesis. Breaking with the tradition of writing comments from older comments, Abduh tried to invent a new method. The principle was to put the Qur'anic text in relation to the modern reality and read it again in this spirit. Abduh therefore chooses to avoid referrals to the old commentators. Admittedly, he has escaped this major aspect, namely that it is impossible to re-read the Qur'an without a sound philology that restores its original context, so as not to project on the text concerns that were not his own. This is where the limits of Abduh's attempt lie, for there can be no exegetical renewal without philology, as there can be no theological renewal without a new philosophical spirit.

However, Abduh proposed intuitions about Qur'anic commentary which are as audacious as his theological intuitions. They were drowned in a commentary, ten

times larger, written by Rashid Rida, which continues to be presented until today as a collaborative work by both men. It is for this reason that it was said previously that Abduh's Qur'anic commentary is among his writings that fell victim to manipulation by Rashid Rida. Here we offer some examples of Abduh's comments attesting to his willingness to anchor the Qur'an in a perspective of openness to the other two monotheistic religions and to encourage the most rational reading that is reconcilable with the letter. of the Qur'an. *Surat al-Fatiha* ("The Preliminary") is the first *sura* of the Qur'anic Vulgate, although it is not considered in the Muslim tradition as the first Surah to have been "revealed" to the Prophet of Islam. This Surah is frequently used by Muslims: it is recited in the five daily prayers, during the celebrations of marriages and burial rites, after the conclusion of a major contract, etc., proving its importance in the structuring of the religious imagination of Islam.

Here is the text of this surah: 1.1. In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful. 1.2. Praise be to Allah, Lord of the universe. 1.3. The All-Merciful, the Most Merciful, 1.4. Master of the Day of Retribution. 1.5. It's You [Alone] that we worship, and it's You [Alone] whom we crave for help. 1.6. Guide us in the right way, 1.7. the way of those whom You have filled with favors, not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.

The idea has been spreading for centuries that this *sura* came in time to condemn Jews and Christians: "the way of those who have incurred the wrath of God" refer to the Jews and the misled are the Christians; Jews and Christians are thus blamed for altering their original religions. "The right way" obviously means the Muslim religion. We know that the dogma of the alteration of revelations prior to Islam is one of the major problems that arise in terms of rapprochement between Islam and the other two monotheistic religions. This idea is very old in the history of Qur'anic exegesis, since it is already found in Tabari (310/923) whose commentary is one of the first to have come to us. The majority of commentators have therefore followed Tabari in their interpretation. Ibn Arabi proposed a more nuanced version of it: he thought that "those who incurred the wrath of God" are those who content themselves with the literal interpretation of the Scriptures; and that those who are "the wanderers" are those who totally poured into gnosis. Jews and Christians would have given examples of these two deviances.[20]

Abduh goes even further. He considers that a person who listened to the Qur'an at the time of the revelation of *Surat al-Fatiha* could not think of a comparison between Islam and other religions, since Judaism and Christianity were established religions and known to all, while Islam was not yet a religion in its own right: it had neither holy books nor codified rites nor a clearly identifiable community. Abduh thought, against the advice of the ancient exegetes, that the *Fatiha* was the first in the order of the vulgate and in the order of revelation. Muhammad could not, indeed, measure himself against other religions the first time he announced the Qur'an!

[20] Ibn Arabi, *Tafsir ibn Arabi*, ed. Beirut, 2001, t. I, pp. 29–30. The attribution of this text to Ibn Arabi is not formally established.

In chronological order, since modern philology gives reason to the ancient exegetes, the *Fatiha* would not be the first *sura* in the so-called order of "revelation." However, modern philology supports Abduh's intuition, namely that the *Fatiha*, which would be the 47th *sura* in chronological order according to the classification of Regis Blachère, would belong to a phase in which Islam was not yet distinguishable of the other two monotheistic religions. It is unlikely that the commentary given since Tabari reflects the original context. Might it instead reflect controversies between Jews, Christians and Muslims at later times? Abduh was right to challenge an idea that was very old in the Qur'anic commentary and very popular because of Muslims' frequent use of *Surat al-Fatiha*. Abduh displayed immense courage in challenging the old authorities and dominant opinions.

For Abduh, the people who preceded Islam are only mentioned in the Qur'an as a lesson. The Jews, for example, are not vilified for being Jews, but because, having preceded Islam, they convey a rich history of happy and unhappy lessons. Abduh recounts that when the *faqihs* took over the direction of Islam, they limited the reading of Muslims to the literal meaning of the Scriptures and imposed the slavish imitation of the Ancients (*taqlid*). In so doing, they repeated the example of the Pharisees in Jewish history and thereby made themselves worthy of the reprimands contained in the Qur'an.[21] One can understand, therefore, from these kinds of verses, the denunciation of formalism and hypocrisy in all religions: "This is a category of people that manifests itself in all nations," writes Abduh.[22] In several places in his commentary, he is ironic about Muslims who think they are superior only by virtue of their belonging to Islam: "The way of God is the same for all humanity, even if religions differ in details according to differences in time and place. The principles are the same." (I: 20).

Moreover, Abduh is distinguished by a particular reading of the categories in which the Qur'an ranks men. Most classical commentators see a clear opposition between the *mu'min* (the believer, faithful to Islam) and the *kafir* (the disbeliever, non-Muslim). But for Abduh, there are two categories of faith: religious faith and natural faith. This distinction is reminiscent of the famous legend of Hayy ibn Yaqdhan, a philosophical tale by the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Tufayl (1185) who sought to prove the possibility of arriving at religious truth outside of religion. Above all, we note how Abduh defines *kufr*: it consists in hiding what is certain of its veracity. *Kufr* is thus not the antonym of Islam (by expanding on this reasoning, one could say that a Muslim can be a miscreant, *kafir*). We do not know how much Abduh was aware of the philological studies on the Qur'an undertaken in the awareness that the Qur'anic categories of men's ranking were reinterpreted according to the controversies appeared in later periods. He therefore realized that the term

[21] Abduh and Rida, *Tafsir al-Manar*, ed. Beirut, 1999. See, for example, I: 144, I: 239, I: 245 and I: 293–295.

[22] See Tafsir al-Manar, ed. Beirut 1999, t. I, p. 133. References will now be indicated in parentheses in the text itself.

mu'min in the Meccan Qur'an was not he who has faith in Islam, but rather he who believes in the hereafter; the category *mu'min* included, as a consequence, Jews and Christians.[23]

In order to get out of the opposition between faith and reason, Abduh downplays the importance of miracles in the Qur'an, even though he has set forth in his theological treatises the arguments which seemed to prove that miracles are, in themselves, an act that does not oppose reason. According to him, Muhammad was a moralist, without miracles: his coming announced the end of the "time of miracles" (*zaman al-mu'jizat*) and the beginning of reasoned "religiosity". The only miracle of Islam is the Qur'an itself, and Abduh thus argues that the miracle, in this case, does not consist in the impossibility of reproducing verses that resemble those of the Qur'an, but rather in the fact that an illiterate (Muhammad) produced them, for this could not be done without divine support.

Abduh's commentary encourages us not to take literally the portrayal of Paradise in the Qur'an. They are representations and not descriptions, he argues. The famous *mutahharat* of the Muslim paradise (the eternal virgins) would not be women given to satisfy the pleasures of men, but wives who, like their husbands, would be cleansed of all misbehavior. The scenes that describe Gehenna are to be taken as speeches intended to arouse the fear of the common people to remove them from all abominable actions. Angels could be simply invisible "natural forces" that govern the universe. The fall of Adam is not to be taken in the literal sense, but rather it refers to the moral degradation of humanity or its transition from a state of nature to a state of culture characterized by sin, wars and injustice. That humanity descends from Adam and Eve is not opposed to the famous Darwinian theory on the evolution of species. Unlike the Jewish and Christian traditions, the Muslim tradition, and particularly the Qur'an, has not given a chronological indication of the beginning of the human presence on Earth, so it is always possible to reconcile the notion of creation and modern theories on the appearance of man. Abduh insisted that the revelation of the Qur'an is not a literal "descent," because it is proven that the Qur'an also speaks of the "descent of iron." The use of the term *inzal* or *tanzil* (descent) is simply motivated by the desire to recall divine omnipotence.

Unfortunately, Abduh did not take into consideration the fact that the reconciliation of faith and reason was a much older approach than some of the thinkers of medieval Islam, since it had begun in Judaism with Philo of Alexandria (45 AD), and in Christianity with the Fathers of the Church, imbued with Greek culture. He tended to think that only Islam was a rational religion. However, his attempt to resume the effort of rapprochement between faith and reason in Islam is meritori-

[23] This theory was suggested by the famous German philologist Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930), author of *History of the Qur'an* (*Geschichte des Qorans*, 1860), completed and published by his followers between 1909 and 1938. This theory is now taken up by American Professor Fred Donner, in his book *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Darwin Press, 1998). It is retained, moreover, in the recent biography of Muhammad written by Professor Hichem Djaït (the second volume being published in Arabic under the title *Tarikhiyyat al-da'wa l-muhammadiyya*, Beirut, 2007).

ous, in the sense that, since the death of Ibn Rushd, this theme had lost its relevance. By radicalizing the thought of Abduh, we could make Islam the religion of the release of religion (we will talk later about the presence of this thesis in Iqbal). Particularly, the symbiosis between Islam and Aristotelianism was an ancient component of the Muslim religion: it is not an event that was grafted on late in its history.

Not all of Abduh's comments have the same audacity and insight. However, they differ markedly from those of Rida. Rida transcribed the lessons of the Qur'anic commentary given by Abduh from 1899 to 1905, and summaries of these lessons began to be published in the *al-Manar* review beginning in 1902. Rida continued to publish them a few years after Abduh's death, and later introduced them in his own comment under the famous title of *Tafsir al-Manar*. We must distinguish, in this immense work, the comments of the Master of the comments of his cumbersome disciple. Abduh commented on the Qur'an of *sura* I to verse 125 of *sura* IV (*al-Nisa*). In this first part, his comments intermingle with those of Rida. Everything else, most of it, was written after his death.

Whenever Abduh proposed a bold interpretation, Rida strove to diminish its significance. Abduh proposed that the angels mentioned in the Qur'an simply designate the forces of nature. This incurred the wrath of the conservative Shaykhs, and Rida asked him to review his words but Abduh persisted and added a note which treated his opponents as narrow-minded and sick. Rida let it be understood, however, that Abduh really only wanted to propose a version that would attract skeptical minds to Islam and contradict the materialists.

Rida rejects the idea that the Qur'anic Paradise is allegorical. According to him, the Qur'an details the delights of paradise so precisely that it becomes impossible to take them in the allegorical sense, even if he blames Muslims who make the parallel between the delights promised in the Qur'an and those known to them down below. Rida says his disagreement with the *mutahharat*, relying on the prophetic tradition that promises every Muslim man that he will be entitled to Paradise to his wife and a "woman of Paradise," even if he admits that the Muslim imaginary has exaggerated these delights by imagining the Muslim surrounded by a large number of these famous virgins. Rida rejects the idea of an allegorical interpretation of the story of Adam's fall. In his opinion, since the Qur'an says that Adam had implored the forgiveness of God for him and his wife, it is because the story is a reality, because one only asks for forgiveness for an act that has actually taken place.[24] He refuses the allegorical interpretation of the revelation and insists on the classical image of the Angel Gabriel who collects the Qur'an from God and descends to transmit it to Muhammad.[25]

The Qur'anic commentary *al-Manar* is more of a testimony to the drifting of Rida's thought than the application, by the disciple, of a method elaborated by the

[24] Cf. *Tafsir al-Manar*, t. I, pp. 193, 195, 243.

[25] Cf. *Tafsir al-Manar*, t. I, p. 144.

master. No effort has been made so far to dissociate, in this famous commentary, what belongs to Rida and what amounts to Abduh (the contribution of Abduh should not exceed one tenth). It is irrelevant to continue to speak of this commentary as if it were the common work of the two men. It is, in fact, two different approaches. In Abduh's approach, he wanted to make the Qur'anic commentary literal in the allegorical sense and to reduce its mystical and metaphysical aspect to give it primacy to ethics. Rida's approach was to rather build a craft whose purpose was to rid the tradition of elements that fell in blatant opposition to the spirit of the time, while remaining within the confines of this tradition and without leaving what was bequeathed by the old authorities. This second step, known as *tahdhib al-turath* (purification of tradition), finally prevailed in all sectors of the "modern" Muslim culture.

2.9 Qur'an and Modern Sciences

Abduh made several overtures in the direction of science, and first of all towards the physical sciences. For him, the Qur'an calls for meditation on the Universe, which is only a means of meditation in the service of faith, since it is also an autonomous object of research for a science that must be emancipated from the gravity of the religious. God is the author of two works, the Qur'an and the Universe, which cannot contradict one another. Abduh was probably unaware that he was resuming Philo of Alexandria's idea, that of his Jewish compatriot! But we know that this idea could only reach him through Muslim philosophy and mysticism. He sometimes tried rather naive rapprochements between the Qur'an and science; this is how he explained, for example, the "birds" of which *sura* 105 speaks by microbes, but he did so with moderation and reserve, recalling that the vocation of the Qur'an was not to state the facts of science, but rather to encourage Muslims to take an interest in it. One of his most daring positions was to argue that the Qur'an's account of creation and Darwin's evolutionary theory were not incompatible. Abduh generally interpreted the Qur'anic accounts in an allegorical sense.

Abduh also had a rather favorable opinion of social science. He called for the acquisition of training in the human and social sciences as a new condition which should be added to those which the ancients demanded from every commentator. The elders required him to be an excellent grammarian, today he must have a solid knowledge of sociology. However, this is the story that has always enjoyed special interest from Abduh. His position in this respect deserves attention.

For Abduh, the Qur'anic account is not part of the story as an objective description of a past reality. In other words, a Qur'anic account should not be considered as an "informative" discourse that can be described as right or wrong, but as a "performative" discourse whose aim is moral and practical. This idea makes it possible to admit that a Qur'anic account can be worthless if it is taken from the angle of history, while its value is rather moral. According to Abduh, "There is nothing in the Qur'an that is part of history as a narrative about the past of nations and cities

known to us. The Qur'an rather contains signs (*ayat*) and lessons (*ibar*) drawn from the experiences of the prophets with their peoples; this served to teach the laws of God (*sunan Allah*) to warn those who refused the Message of Muhammad, blessing be upon him, and to comfort the Prophet and the faithful. For this reason, the Qur'an is not interested in the details of the facts or in the order of the sequences."[26]

To dissociate the Qur'anic narrative from the historical narrative was no doubt a useful answer to the challenges that modern science posed to the sacred books. To implicitly support that the Qur'an's account of this or that event might be imprecise from a historical point of view is a bold position. According to Abduh, such a conclusion does not involve any offense to the Qur'an since the value of it is defined in relation to its moral teaching. It is true that this position was not without faults. Indeed, to admit that one can adopt a "distorted" version of an event for the needs of morality is to tolerate all sorts of manipulations of history for the needs that the moralist considers legitimate. Abduh did not deprive himself of it, as can be seen in his pamphlet "The attitude of Islam and Christianity in the face of science and civilization." Like most Muslim reformers of the nineteenth century, Abduh's concern was to preserve history's moral function, leaving it to the professional historians to deal with its methodology. History turns out to be the memory of humanity that the moralist must meditate in broad outline without discussing the details. It is good to remember that the nineteenth century, which was the century of the rise of history as an autonomous science, was also a century haunted by the search for a general philosophy of history. Party of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima*, which he was the first to teach in Egypt (the first in Egypt, because it was known in Turkey and the Maghreb), and later meeting the great historical philosophies of the West, Abduh was tempted to be the Ibn Khaldun of modern Islam. His lessons on *Muqaddima* were recorded in a book titled "Social and Historical Philosophy," which is unfortunately lost today.

2.10 Abduh and the Liberal Current

We have seen previously that many have quarreled over the recognition of Abduh's intellectual fatherhood both during his lifetime and after his death. Each group or school was anxious to demonstrate that Abduh belonged to his own camp. It must be acknowledged that it is not only in religious circles that disputes took place, far from it. For example, Farah Antun (1874–1922) published a series of articles on al-Afghani and Abduh in 1906, but the negative reactions of his readers forced him to stop there. In other words, the problem was fundamentally a problem of mentality, that of a mentality that accepts history only as a form of idealization of the characters who served the cause of religion and of the nation: it is because Abduh's biography written by Rida corresponded to the spirit that it was particularly well received. The idea of a story that progresses and sees each generation going one step

[26] Cf. *Tafsir al-Manar*, t. I, pp. 204–205.

further in achieving progress then remained unthinkable. The "authoritative" reading that later developed from Rida's biography marginalized some liberal attempts that, while claiming the paternity of Abduh, had tried to go further in the development of some of his ideas. Here are some of the most significant examples:

(a) Qasim Amin (1863–1908) – The links between Qasim Amin and Muhammad Abduh are well known. Qasim Amin is known in the Arab world for being the first to fight for the advancement of women. He published two daring books, the first in 1899 titled *Tahrir al-mar'a* (The Liberation of Women) and the second in 1900 named *al-Mar'a l-jadida* (The New Woman). Both books caused an uproar in their time and were condemned by the men of religion. Abduh, who was the official *mufti*, never anathematized the works or their author. His silence thus expressed his tacit agreement with the essential positions of Qasim Amin, and their friendship was not shaken by this affair. It cannot be ruled out that Abduh helped his friend in writing the religious part of the first book; some even say that Abduh is the true author of this book and hid behind his friend's name to preserve his function as *mufti*. Qasim Amin, in fact, could not write within a year two books on the same subject, two books whose style and content are distinctly different.

(b) Ali Abd al-Raziq (1888–1966) – The argument, in 1925, provoked one of the greatest controversies in modern Islam: al-Raziq's book aimed to prove that the caliphate is not a religious necessity. Abduh would not have shared all the arguments of the author of *al-Islam wa-usul al-hukm* (Islam and the Foundations of Power) but it is indisputable that he had opened the way by two main ideas: the civil character of the caliphal institution and the improbability of a unanimous agreement of the community (what the jurisconsults call the *ijma*). However, most of Abd al-Raziq's reasoning in his book is based on these two ideas. He established that the caliphate was mentioned neither in the Qur'an nor in the sayings of the Prophet and that it could not be reasoned by analogy (*qiyas*). Its only possible foundation was therefore the *ijma*, so the unanimous agreement of the community was impossible to imagine on this kind of subject. He concluded that the caliphate was not an Islamic obligation. Ali Abd al-Raziq radicalized Abduh's idea of the civilian character of the Muslim government. His thesis implies that religion must not interfere in politics and that the expression of an "Islamic government," in the sense of a religious government, is an empty expression.

Moreover, at the time of the publication of Abd al-Raziq's essay, several commentators had drawn a parallel between the two men's theses. The Egyptian journals *al-Muqtataf*, *al-Hilal* and *al-Siyasa* defended Abd al-Raziq and compared him to Abduh, who fought alone against al-Azhar's conservative *ulema*. The magazine *al-Siyasa* was then the spokesman of the liberal current and went so far as to reproduce all the passages of Abduh's writings that could support Abd al-Raziq's thesis.[27]

[27] Abd al-Raziq's book has been translated into French by Abdou Filali Ansari, *Islam and the Foundations of Power*, La Découverte, 1994.

(c) Salama Musa (1887–1958) – Salama Musa, who was one of the apostles of Arab intellectual liberalism, had focused much of his writings on the necessary freedom of thought and often sheltered himself under the authority of Abduh to assert that Islam did not oppose it. He regarded Abduh as the liberator of Arab thought. Although Musa's references were mostly Western and he himself was not a Muslim, he had consistently claimed for himself the intellectual authorship of Abduh for the liberal movement he advocated for. Musa's motto was that of freedom: Abduh embodied, according to him, the symbol of religious freedom in modern Islam, like Luther in the Christian tradition.

(d) Taha Husayn (1889–1973) – The interrelated nature of Abduh's ideas and those of Taha Husayn are too numerous to be enumerated in a single paragraph. Husayn had attended a few lessons given by Abduh at al-Azhar, and he, like Abduh, had been haunted by the problem of educational reform in Egypt. In his famous essay on the pre-Islamic poetry *Fil-shi'r al-jahili* (1926), he addressed to al-Azhar the same criticisms that had already been expressed by Abduh. In his autobiography al-Ayyam (The Days), he described the frustration felt by him and his fellow students following Rashid Rida's reversals after Abduh's death. It should be pointed out that Husayn's essay on pre-Islamic poetry, in which he stated his doubts about the authenticity of this poem, provoked an outcry from religious men who had inferred that this doubt might extend to the Qur'an itself. Was not this the product of the same period? They therefore pronounced the anathema against the author and his book was blacklisted. Rashid Rida then participated in the condemnation of the book.

(e) Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah (1916–1988) – This Egyptian writer was later made famous by a thesis condemned and prohibited by al-Azhar. He had the audacity to treat, from a new angle, the delicate problem of the "Qur'anic tale." Undoubtedly, the author was only developing an idea already expressed by Abduh, that which consisted in asserting that the Qur'anic legends were not intended to give historical information but that they essentially served the needs of the preaching and morality.[28] This problem was already mentioned above in the discussion of Abduh's Qur'anic commentary.

(f) Mahmud Abu Rayya (1979) – He is the author of *Adwa ala l-Sunnah l-Muhammadiyya* (Enlightenment on the Prophetic Tradition, 1958). This is another one of the sacrilegious books banned by the religious authorities and which provoked strong controversy in their time. Like Abduh, the author was skeptical about the authenticity of all the *hadiths* (so-called prophets) reported in canonical books. He developed, consequently, a thesis which finds its sources and its support for Abduh: the author did not fail to recall it in various passages of his book. According to him, it was necessary to limit oneself to Qur'anic text and to refuse any expression attributed to the Prophet of Islam, which would have no equivalent in the Qur'an.

[28] *Al-fann al-qasasi fi al-Qur'an al-karim* (The Art of Narrative in the Holy Qur'an) was published in 1948.

All the authors mentioned here have radicalized intuitions that can be traced back to Abduh. We know that the First World War shook all involved societies to the core, including of course Muslim societies and their then dominant moral and symbolic order. All of these authors were influenced by Abduh's teaching before moving on to a more radical stage of thought. Admittedly, many of them eventually broke away from the classical reformism of Abduh, but they owed him their first free thoughts in favor of reform. Arab society was thus torn between two trends: liberalism and fundamentalism. These authors constituted the liberal generation of the inter-war period. At the same time, Rashid Rida was moving towards more rigid positions. He undertook to refute some of the new liberal theses and, as a result, participated in the anti-liberal crusade unleashed by religious institutions.

2.11 Critical Assessment

Let it be clear that we are not talking about calling for a "return" to Abduh. We only wish to highlight his spirit of openness and daringness, which has nothing to do with the fundamentalism of the Wahhabis or the Muslim Brotherhood. It is from this spirit that today's Islam should be inspired. Abduh's philosophy certainly has its limits and remains conditioned, like all thought, by the characteristics of its time. Abduh lived in a context of colonial struggle: he substituted an identitary Islam for a scholastic Islam. He lived through the great century of positivism and rationalism: he adhered to the cult of reason without understanding the ruptures in modern thought between the *Aql-Logos* of medieval philosophy and the 'positive' reason of modern philosophy (Arabic uses until today the same term to designate the whole!) There was, in Abduh's writing, an overuse of the term *aql* which went together with a near total absence of any attempt to define it. Ultimately, Abduh's 'reason' is only common sense and community consciousness, both of which are a discourse of knowledge, dogma, and values with universal claim. Abduh's thought is pre-Kantian. It did not separate the conceived from the real, nor speculative reason from practical reason. Against the ideal of the Enlightenment, it continued to erect a barrier between the *khassa* (the elite, the initiates) and the *amma* (the mass, the people). Abduh was still far from having assimilated the modern scientific revolution, to the point that it is sometimes surprising to speak of a sublunary and infra-lunar world or of three souls: memory, imagination, and reasoning. It will be necessary to wait for someone like Muhammad Iqbal to see operate, in the religious thought in Islam, a real attempt of reconstruction which integrates in modern philosophical thought. But Iqbal was a graduate of Western universities. Abduh was the product of classical religious universities. "I've spent my whole life trying to get rid of the nonsense I was taught at al-Azhar," he said. It is this critical sense, emerging from within the very Muslim tradition, that seems to us worthy of interest.[29]

[29] For a detailed critique of the conceptual universe of Abduh and his generation, the reader should consult our already quoted thesis: "Critical Essay of Theological Reason: The Example of Muhammad Abduh," op. cit. to note 1.

References

Abdou Filali Ansari. 1994. *Islam and the Foundations of Power*. La Découverte.
Abduh, and Rida. 1999. *Tafsir al-Manar*. Beirut.
Alain, Libera. 1993. *Medival Philosophy*. P.U.F.
Aquinas, Thomas. 2004. *De unitate intellectus contra averroistas*. Vrin.
Ibn Arabi. 2001. *Tafsir ibn Arabi*, t. I, 29–30. Beirut.
Donner, Fred. 1998. *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*. Darwin Press.
Etienne, Gilson. 1999. *Philosophy of the Middle Ages*. Payot.
Gardet, and Anawati. 1970. *Introduction to Muslim Theology*. Vrin.
Kedourie, E., al-Afghani, and Abduh. 1966. *An Essay on Religion Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*. London.
Mohamed, Arkoun. 1982. *Arab Humanism in the IV–X Centuries: Philosopher et Historian Miskawayh*. Vrin.
Umara Muhammad. 1973–1974. *al-Amal al-kamila* (Complete works), 6 vol. Beirut.
Abduh Muhammad. 1990. *al-Islam wa al-nasraniyya bayna al-ilm wa al-madaniyya* (Islam and Christianity between science and civilization), 57. Alger.
Olivier, Roy. 1992. *The Failure of Political Islam*, 24. Seuil.
Pakdaman, Homa. 1969. *Djamal ed-Din Assad Abadi dit Afghani*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose.

Chapter 3
The Paradigm of Reform

Abstract This re-reading of Abduh should pave the way for a re-reading of the whole movement called *islahi* (reformer): it must be distinguished from its rival, the Salafi movement. We would like here to give some milestones for a new critical history of the reformation in Islam. In the same way as Abduh's' dominant representation, which we have attempted to deconstruct earlier, the dominant representation of Islamic reform in modern times should also be revisited.

Keywords Paradigm · Reform · Egypt · Tunisia · Turkey · Caliphate · Fatwa

3.1 Birth of a Paradigm

This re-reading of Abduh should pave the way for a re-reading of the whole movement called *islahi* (reformer): it must be distinguished from its rival, the Salafi movement. We would like here to give some milestones for a new critical history of the reformation in Islam. In the same way as Abduh's' dominant representation, which we have attempted to deconstruct earlier, the dominant representation of Islamic reform in modern times should also be revisited.

Religious reform is a rewarding and rehabilitative experience for how the sacred is represented in relation to the demands of new situations as experienced in a changing era. This is reflected, in the case of monotheistic religions, by a re-adaptation of hermeneutical attitudes, that is, the mechanisms that structure the collective vision of the world. From this definition, one can note the existence of structural similarities between the situations of the three religious traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam vis-a-vis modernity. These similarities underscore commonalities that were already observed in the medieval age.[1] It is worth noting,

[1] We proposed a long theoretical development of this definition in a lecture given in Arabic under the title "What is religious reform?" (UNESCO Chairs Conference Cycle, 2001). The slightly revised exposition has been published in our book *The Religion of the Individual Consciousness*, op. cit. to note 1.

M. Haddad, *Muslim Reformism - A Critical History*, Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations 11, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36774-9_3

moreover, the term "valorizing" in the definition that has been proposed. It is through interpretation that a human group can feel connected to its tradition and memory while transgressing them for the needs of a new experience. Reinterpretation is the key to any reformation and therefore the right way to value attitudes that turn out to be inevitable.

Indeed, in moments of great change, the social imaginary stands out from the religious imagination. Religious reform is manifested in a quest for the "true meaning" of religion, the very meaning of its origins. Without expressing itself in a deliberate way, and by a sort of "cunning of reason," this search for origins opens the way to a series of new representations more adapted to the spirit of the times. Fundamentalist tendencies are those that persist in literally nostalgic origins. Reformation trends are those that give primacy to reinterpretation to promote rehabilitation. This hermeneutic situation may encompass different religious experiences, all motivated by the idea of reform, regardless of the historical contexts and event data in which these religious experiences took place.

In so doing, the so-called monotheistic religions do not only overlap with their monotheism, but also and especially with an element affecting the present and the future: their capacity and propensity to reform and adapt to the condition of the modern man. The idea of reform was born in the Muslim world because it had to confront a modernity in whose development it had not directly participated. The "modern" period of Islam only began in the eighteenth century and was confirmed in the nineteenth century. Muslims, then discovering this modernity, found, in reaction, a sign of the "decadence" of Islam. They diverged regarding the means for bringing Islam out of this decadence: should we fight this modernity at all costs or adapt to it by integrating its essential elements in their material and spiritual culture? All modern Muslim "thought" developed around this dilemma. In the debates that have seen Muslims tear each other apart over the last two centuries, two different levels must be distinguished: a debate at the very level of the state and a debate on what would be called "traditional civil society" (in Arabic, *al-mujtama al-ahli*).

The weakening of intellectual centers and classical institutions inevitably led to the expansion of peripheral cultures and encouraged spontaneous projects in the management of the sacred. In the eighteenth century, a major change affected the entire Mediterranean world. In Europe, the classical order slowly collapsed and gave way to the Enlightenment, and in the Muslim world, the medieval order embodied by scholastic science and the system of the caliphate was in turn shaken to give way to two great religious manifestations: the Sufi brotherhoods, on the one hand, which have multiplied and flourished everywhere, and that of the neo-Hanbalism on the other which resurfaced after centuries of marginalization.[2]

The early Ottoman dynasty, lived through these debates. With the intention of reforming the decadent Muslim Empire, *caliph* Selim III sent emissaries to Europe to describe the state of the continent. The observations he collected sparked debates

[2] Ahmad ibn Hanbal (855) is the founder of the rigid line of Sunni Islam. He inspired the so-called Salafi current in the fourteenth century (see note 6 of Chap. 1).

on how to best carry out reforms of the Empire and on the attitude that should be taken with regard to religion – which structured the whole of the collective vision that Muslims make of the world. Seyyid Ali Effendi, ambassador to Paris from 1797 to 1802, returned home delighted with his stay. For him, religion, far from being a handicap to reforms, must be transformed into a catalyst to allow Muslims to take over the West or, at least, to put itself at its level. This vision was undertaken by two more famous writers, al-Tahtawi in Egypt and Khayr al-Din in Tunis.

In 1802, an ambassador named Halet (Khalid) Effendi succeeded him; he lived his stay in the West like a Calvary, and wrote that "the oppression of blasphemy has submerged everywhere (…). We occupy our time with difficulty, sometimes by the exchange of words between believers, sometimes by the reading of the Qur'an. The atmosphere of the land of the Franks is not made for Muslims. May God deliver us soon."[3] For him, there was no doubt, the new civilization is completely opposed to the Muslim religion and there is nothing to borrow from the blasphemous and corrupt West. Such were the two attitudes that represented the alternative that Muslims had to face.

The dilemma was unprecedented in scope. From the start, one could see the peculiarity of the new situation of Islam in relation to its situation of the medieval age. But this dilemma could only be expressed in the classical and religious language inherited from the Muslim tradition. Trying to describe a new situation with old vocabulary, to reflect change in the framework of continuity, to move forward boldly while safeguarding the lost roots of the past: this is how a new paradigm is born, the one which we must recall precisely the paradigm of *islah* (reform). We were looking for a lost Islam, whereas we had lived until then as an obvious and natural presence. Being a Muslim stopped being an immediate datum to become the search for oneself. Against all appearance, modern Islam has been, since this period, in an irrevocable process of secularization. God is no longer given in all evidence, and is rather to be found or reinvented to satisfy the new needs of the city and the time when it asserts itself.

It was not only these debates in the ruling class, power-holders and managers of this state-religion that was called Islam. Any situation of disruption implies the weakening of the control exerted by political institutions and official ideologies. And the longer these institutions delay solving the problems of their societies, the more they lose control over other emerging forces. It is precisely in this context that the advent of Wahhabism, which has already been mentioned, is explained and should be analyzed here in its religious fallout.

Born and raised in the Arabian Peninsula, the Hanbali Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab professed a teaching based on the return to the simplicity of the original Islam. In the desert of the peninsula, in the midst of tribes which have remained a thousand leagues from the tumults of civilization, this teaching experienced considerable success. Allied to the al-Saud tribe, this movement quickly turned into an armed and often violent form of activism. It then developed and spread in marginal

[3] Embassy relations, translated by Stéphane Yerasimos, Actes sud, 1998.

circles of Islam. It only echoed in societies loosely supervised by the official *ulemas* and governors of the Ottoman Caliphate: in India, Yemen, the Sahara, and even the Sultanate of Marrakech, whose sovereign Muhammad ibn Abdallah (1757–1790) was the only Arab ruler to escape the authority of the Istanbul Caliph. The scholars then mobilized themselves to counter the threat posed by Wahhabism against their symbolic power. The Ottoman *caliph*, for its part, was afraid of the progress and success of this doctrine and encouraged the governor of Egypt, the famous Muhammad Ali, to wage war on them in 1818 in the hopes of reducing their influence. Later, when the authority of the caliphal institution began to wane, Wahhabism found a second impetus under the direction of Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud, founder of the present kingdom, which also benefited from the oil windfall which began to enrich the region.

The Wahhabi doctrine is reminiscent of Luther's and Calvin's practices. It destabilized official religious authority, not only questioning the legitimacy of official scholars and recognized religious institutions, but also destabilizing the mechanisms of religious authority and the transmission of religious knowledge, refounding social relations with the sacred. Two typical examples confirm this. There is, first of all, the issue of *ijtihad* (or personal effort). Of course, one cannot expect to find in this respect modern positions among the Wahhabis. However, they brandished the principle of *ijtihad* to challenge the authority of the *ulema*, *qadis* and other representatives of institutional Islam. The latter drew their authority in their capacity as depositories of knowledge that had been regularly transmitted for several generations. To devalue the *taqlid* (imitation of the old authorities) was therefore to socially downgrade this "nobility of dress," which then lost the privilege of having the right to say Islam and to issue *fatwas* in his name.

Moreover, the theme of *ijtihad* had another, even deeper, implication which is related to the representation of salvation, the major concern of any religious conscience. Indeed, to impose the personal effort on all amounts to individualizing the salvation of each believer. In the case of Wahhabism, it was not a question of inciting the believer to theological speculation or spiritual experience, but of making him personally responsible for this effort to conform to God's orders and prohibitions in the two "sources" of his revelation, namely, the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Wahhabism thus no longer needed Theology or legal speculation: it was intended to undermine them in favor of a direct and living relationship with the God who manifested himself to the world by his word, the Qur'an, and by his Law. He therefore contented himself with a pastoral and rigorous reading of the Divine Enunciation, which was reduced to a series of orders and prohibitions.

The second example concerns the prohibition of the worship of saints and all signs embodying any sacredness. The Wahhabis systematically destroyed the tombs of the saints, and even razed those who were supposed to preserve the bodies of the descendants and companions of the Prophet of Islam. The interventions and teachings of the Wahhabis on this subject evoke the war that Calvin, in his time, led against the relics of the saints. In both cases, it made sense to reduce a popular devotion which favors superstition in favor of a devotion which remains in the intimacy

of consciousness. In this way, a new relationship is established with the sacred, which is devoid of all materiality.

In fact, these two examples come together. To mediate with divinity, theology, the marabout, the treaty of law or the relic, is to complicate and institutionalize the relationship between the human and the divine. Wahhabism thus undermines the two foundations of the dominant religiosity, that of the general public of the believers and that of the elite of the *ulema*. The conservative and violent ideas of Wahhabism are the first major challenge that institutional Islam has to face in modern times.

Luther and Calvin, too, did not profess modern ideas, but it is the reception of their ideas in a modernizing world that has given them a modern meaning. What is surprising today is the great importance which the Christian Reformation gave to the question of relics, to the point of arousing the most bitter oppositions. As we know, the debates between supporters and opponents of the Reformation did not have democratic freedoms or modern science as themes in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. Moreover, European societies had begun their first transformation towards modernity well before the Reformation, as illustrated by Magna Carta (1215) and Copernicus (1473–1543). The questions raised by the Reformation focused on indulgences, justification by faith, self-referee, baptism, consubstantiation, the Saint Cene and the other sacraments, among others. These would appear quite strange outside of the religious realm. It should be recalled, when it comes to dealing with debates between the Wahhabis and their detractors, that some were more conservative and more violent than others. But the main issue was neither tolerance nor modernity: the challenge then became the will to safeguard or undermine the authority of institutional Islam.

In such a context exclusively marked by religion, the two attitudes could only be expressed by resorting to religious language. The answers of the *ulema* to the Wahhabis were probably more rational, but the positions of the Wahhabis proved to be the most radical. However, Wahhabism did not lead to the affirmation of the autonomy of the subject, unlike the Christian Reformation. While undermining the authority of the official clergy, Wahhabism did not leave room for the individual to develop and move himself as an autonomous subject. The comparison between Wahhabism and Protestantism cannot go as far as some have hoped. Amin al-Rayhani, the Maronite Christian who was banished from his community because of his anticlerical ideas, has already been mentioned; influenced by Voltaire and Rousseau, he had challenged men of religion by audacious articles. He left Lebanon for the United States and was naturalized as an American citizen. It is surprising to find him later, in 1931, next to Ibn Saud; he became al-Saud's biographer and praised him by dedicating many poems to him. This is certainly due to personal motives, but it seems that al-Rayhana believed that Wahhabism was a first step towards unifying the Arab world against the Ottomans, just as Luther's doctrine had allowed him to bring the German nation together against the Pope. It is therefore not surprising that Rashid Rida, who thought that the revival of Islam could only be achieved by the return of Islam to its Arabic cradle, had an even deeper attachment to Wahhabism.

3.2 The Shaking of the Old Order

Be that as it may, the development of Wahhabi ideology went hand in hand with the collapse of the Ottoman caliphate and institutional Islam. Little by little, the margins of Islam were no longer the only ones to find themselves in chaos, nor were some isolated scholars isolated in the turmoil. The very centers of spiritual and temporal power were largely shaken, as state reforms all ended in failure.

In fact, the "Islams of Empire" were forced to live with a new political reality that was the appearance of the nation-state. The problem of the relationship between state and religion was therefore in a context that was similar to the one that Christianity has been confronted with since the sixteenth century. The problem was usually one of moving from one form of socio-political organization to another, from a type of traditional domination to a type of modern domination, of a situation in which the central power relentlessly exercised an extended and centralizing power situation.

In Europe, nation states finally prevailed over the dream of a supranational "Holy Empire". The religious consequence of this transformation was the fragmentation of religious authority, which was then shared between the Pope and the kings (hence the quarrel of investitures). In the process, knowledge was shared in turn between theologians and free thinkers. In doing so, the adherence of faith was transferred from an institution external to the inner heart of the believer, taken individually. The history of modern Christianity cannot obviously be reduced to a struggle between two tendencies, that of a "retrograde" Catholicism versus a "modernizing" Reformation. Some forms of Protestantism have been less than modern and Catholicism has realized its own reforms. It is only over the long term that we become aware of the complexity of historical advances.

The rise of nationalism in Europe also triggered the colonial competitions. From the end of the eighteenth century, the dynamic of commercial and military forces definitively favored Europe. As a result, many territories of Islam were conquered or threatened by it. The Muslims began to realize that what they believed to be their "religious superiority" was no longer the guarantee of "political and civilizational superiority." This situation gave rise, in the conscience of the Muslims, the desire to make a path that would take the model of European power while remaining religiously faithful to the model of classical Islam – that of an Islam of supranational Empire. The search for a "proto-nationalist" Islam or a Muslim "proto-nationalism" went hand in hand with the fear of political fragmentation that would reduce Muslims to disparate communities that could easily be dominated. As a result, this most complex situation led to the search for a hybrid solution, that of a strong nation-state whose destiny would be to restore the grandeur of the Muslim Empire! For it to be strong, such a state should emulate the model of the European nation-state; for it to be legitimate, it should preserve the nostalgia for a supra-national religious state. It is this contradiction that the reformers of the nineteenth century had to solve.

In Ottoman Islam, the relation of the state to religion consisted, in theory, in putting the sword at the service of religion. For that, it was admitted that the Prince can benefit from a large margin of freedom of decision; the concern for the greatness of Islam made any compromise acceptable, even with dogma, if it proved indispensable to preserve this greatness. It was up to the authorized exegetes to find him the necessary justifications. This situation allowed the emergence of a field of authority which rested on a particular legitimacy which was no longer of a religious nature, even if it gave itself, for the end, the realization of a religious ideal. It is this theory of the two concordant authorities, that of the clerk and that of politics, that was taken up and developed by the reformers of the nineteenth century to make their reforms more acceptable.

There were therefore two paradoxes to manage: that of a state that wanted to be a nation, empire and religion at the same time, and that of a reform that had to be justified by religion to reduce the influence of religion in the City management. The three greatest state reforms of the nineteenth century illustrate these paradoxes well and show how they were almost doomed to fail, as their objectives were ambiguous and contradictory.

The first state reform was carried out from the capital of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman sultans tried to organize a centralizing power in their vast empire which brought together very different societies and ethnic groups. It culminates in the so-called Tanzimat era: it was led by Abdul-Mejid I (1839–1861) who institutionalized the reforms of his two predecessors, Selim III (1789–1807) and Mahmud II (1808–1839). Restoring the power of the Empire by reorganizing it according to a model of central administration like the European nation states was a real challenge. The highly diversified societies and ethnic groups of the Empire had until then coexisted because the political power had no centralizing vocation. Modernization thus opened chasms that could not be bridged, inevitably accelerating the dismemberment of the Empire.

Admittedly, the Ottoman Empire had the peculiarity of being equipped very early on with an imposing bureaucratic administration. Süleyman (1520–1566), whom the Europeans called The Magnificent, was the founder of this administrative organization. The Muslims called him *al-qanuni*, meaning "the legislator." The term *qanun* means law that is not strictly Islamic. According to Bernard Lewis, the term is of Semitic origin and is related to the Turkish language via Greek and Arabic:

> In medieval employment, *qanun* is sometimes synonymous with *dustur*, in the sense of a list or role of taxes and revenues. In Ottoman times, it was a customary practice for rules and regulations or procedural manuals of various organizations, such as trade guilds, tax bureaus, and other administrative departments. There was the *qanun* from an office, the *qanun* from a province, and even the *qanun* from the Empire. *Qanun* could also mean code of behavior or conduct, setting out general principles. In an earlier Ottoman period, *qanun* could have various elements and include the local custom and the will of the ruler as well as the principles of Shariah law. Later, the term *qanun* often referred to a law made by the state, or non-religious, as opposed to Shariah law. In the course of the 19th century, when the reformers promulgated new codes and created new magistrates to put them into effect,

qanun was the term applied to all these codes. The choice of an Ottoman administrative term and, in particular, a term indicating a contrast with Shariah, is certainly significant.[4]

This contrast between the qanun and the Shariah, which expresses the will of God, can be traced to the medieval period, even if it took on a more definite character during the period of the reforms. It is Süleyman, known as *al-qanuni*, who frequently used the *qanuns* (decrees) to organize the state, thus creating, in fact, an authority and a legislation which relies on the authority of the state and not on that of religion: in fact, it is not required of *qanun* that it depends explicitly on the imperatives of religion, but simply that it does not oppose openly to its basic principles.

It should also be pointed out that this administrative organization encompassed the religious domain itself. The Ottomans had systematically integrated the *qadis* and *muftis* into the official body of civil servants and, consequently, their salaries were provided by the state. During the decadence of the Empire, corruption eventually ruined this bureaucracy and the religious leaders gained in power. When Selim III acceded to the throne in 1789, he decided to introduce Western military techniques into his army, along the lines of those of the French Revolution, thus inviting European instructors to teach his executives. He also allowed the creation of a printing press and the translation of Western works in military techniques and modern science. He was then deposed following an alliance between army officers and high dignitaries of the religion.

It took more than a quarter of a century for his successor, Mahmud II, to resume the modernization of the army. It was clear at the time that the army, the true pillar of the Empire, no longer had the means to oppose the Empire's enemies or even to cause them concern. The Russians severely defeated the Ottoman army in 1774 in the Crimean War and forced the Sultan to separate from one of his largest provinces for the first time. The French had seized Egypt in 1798 without worrying about the Ottoman warnings. However, Mahmud II was able to get rid of the old janissaries' corps and to undertake the modernization of the army only in 1826. This illustrates how much the forces of inertia were preponderant in the Empire. In particular, the reform of the military apparatus could only be undertaken if accompanied by political and economic reform. Mahmud II is thus at the origin of this period called Tanzimat. He opened schools to train civil servants and doctors, sent young Turks to study in Europe, and tried, more or less, to reorganize the Empire administratively.

It was Abdul-Mejid I who went the furthest by promulgating two decrees of capital importance. The first was the Edict of Gülhane (1839). It particularly states: "The whole world knows that in the early days of Ottoman rule the glorious precepts of the Qur'an and the laws of the Empire have always been honored. The Empire, as a result, gained in power and greatness and all its subjects, without exception, acceded to the greatest prosperity. Over the last one hundred and fifty years, repeated misfortunes and miscellaneous causes have led to the neglect of the

[4] See Lewis Bernard, *The Political Language of Islam*, translated from English by Odette Guitard, Gallimard, 1988, pp. 173–174.

sacred code of laws and rules, and the power and prosperity of inaugural times has given way to weakness and decadence. An empire loses its stability as soon as it stops observing its laws […]".

Introducing modern laws under the guise of returning to the principles of the "inaugural" times, was the ploy that aimed to welcome the reforms being undertaken. These consisted principally in imposing equality between the subjects of the Empire, regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliation. This equality imposed three main axes of intervention: to guarantee to all the subjects the safety of their life and their goods, to establish a fair and clear system of raising taxes, and to adopt equitable provisions with regard to the raising of the armed troops and the duration of their military service.

The second decree that came to confirm the first was the Ottoman Reform Edict (1856). It was more explicit on the points already mentioned: "The guarantees promised in the Edict of Gülhane in conformity with the Tanzimat, to all our subjects without distinction of class or religion for the safety of their person and their property and the safeguarding of their honor, are confirmed and consolidated. And the Sultan personally pledged to "take energetic measures to guarantee to every community, regardless of the number of its followers, the total freedom of worship (…) because all forms of religion are and will be freely professed, no subject will be embarrassed in the practice of the religion to which they adhere, nor will they be vexed as such. No one will be forced to change their religion." This second decree consisted mainly of new provisions concerning the right to property and the principle of a single taxation. But who were the Sultan's subjects who took advantage of the freedom of worship and the right to property? It was not only the Ottoman Christians, but also the Europeans who came to settle in the Muslim territories. And that's the rub. The essence of the two decrees rested on the mutation of the Empire which went from a supranational form legitimized by the Muslim religion to a multi-religious form justified by the idea of religious tolerance. This transition to a modern form of the state lacked the essential, meaning the notion of citizenship. Paradoxically, the political language of Islam then played against the Empire, because the absence of the notion of citizenship led the sultans to speak in terms of equality between cults rather than between citizens. As a result, foreign companies enjoyed the same property and taxation rights as "corporate" businesses, because only religious affiliation was considered in terms of rights and duties within the Empire. The political language of Islam paradoxically served as the economic "imperialism" of the West.

In 1876, the Empire no doubt had a constitution, but it was already at the beginning of its decomposition. The conservative Sultan Abdul-Hamid II (1876–1909) decreed then abrogated it quickly, since he preferred a more muscular policy which sent the Empire into a torment from which it never recovered. As Ali Merad writes, the proposed reforms were in any case "far from the state of minds and customs, let alone the aspiration of public opinion. Finalized hastily under the pressure of the European Powers, they were greeted with bitterness by conservatives, but also by the reformists such Nami Kemal (1840–1888). In the eyes of both, they represented not so much a promise of social emancipation, but rather the sign of the decline of

the Islamic Empire. Without a radical reorganization of its structures and a radical overhaul of its ideology, the Ottoman state, the sick man of Europe, will resign itself more and more to the irremediable degradation of its military power and its influence on the international scene."[5] In 1924, Kemal Atatürk put an end to the plight of the Turks by repealing the caliphate and proclaiming a secular republic.

At almost the same time period, a similar experiment was conducted in Egypt by Muhammad Ali (1805–1848). He had come to power following the collapse of the reign of Mamelukes and the failure of Bonaparte's ventures to the East (1798–1801). He had pursued an active policy based on the centralization of administration, taxes, farms and foreign trade. Although Muhammad Ali was not Egyptian himself, he had the qualities of those great medieval empire builders: a cunning adventurer, he was also a gifted administrator. He was a two-for-one dream figure: an Arab Bonaparte and the next *caliph* of Islam. From one adventure to another, he rushed into action in Sudan, Syria, and Arabia. He ends up quickly revealing his deepest desires: to impose himself as prince tutor to the *caliph* himself or, better still, to grab this coveted title. His ambitions clashed with the policy of the European powers. All that remained of his dream of empire was that of seeing his family recognize a right of succession to the throne of Egypt.

Egypt at the time had considerable assets and could afford a policy of bold reforms. Its agricultural exports and its economic situation made it the most prosperous country in the Middle East. In addition, the brief period of French administration that the country had known had already prepared the minds to accommodate modern knowledge and an unusual way of life. Muhammad Ali was thus able to make a series of provisions aimed at centralizing the power of the state by reforming the system of taxes, education, the army, and the administration. Although he was illiterate, he had asked for Turkish books on the life of Napoleon Bonaparte and the history of Europe, as well as Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima* and Machiavelli's *Prince*. These works, some of them being printed in Egypt, were explained to him and commented by the translators. It was in the field of military reform that this policy was a great success. The Egyptian army was then completely re-founded to become the most powerful armies of the region, even more powerful than the caliph's army, of which Muhammad Ali was theoretically only the representative in Egypt, as governor. Despite the ambitions of Muhammad Ali, however, this army never reached such a level as to render it capable of seriously disturbing Western armies.

The army was supposed to be the hub of all the activities of the country. It was necessary to introduce modern medicine to treat the wounds of its soldiers as well as foreign languages to translate the war manuals, and also to centralize the collection of taxes to finance its armament and the balances of its men. The modernization of the army thus triggered a new dynamic and allowed the establishment of schools of medicine, pharmacology, civil engineering, foreign languages, and translation. The people were not, therefore, an actor in this policy of reform; on the contrary, they often suffered the negative consequences. Agrarian policy, for example, ran

[5] See Merad Ali, *Contemporary Islam*, P.U.F., 4th ed. corrected, 1992, p. 26.

into a failing system in terms of profitability, which, on the contrary, had been rooted for centuries in minds modeled solely by the subsistence economy. Moreover, its profitability was not intended to serve the general well-being, but rather to finance the army's budget. Muhammad Ali had the good fortune rid himself of the *ulema's* control early in his reign. His power was therefore limitless, was based on an artificial *asabiyya* (clan solidarity) that united a mercenary corps from all sides. Muhammad Ali did not even speak Arabic fluently, which was the language of the Egyptian majority.

Muhammad Ali never promulgated legal texts to frame his reform action, such as a *Hatt-i humayun* in Istanbul or a pact of protection in Tunis. However, he went very far in the exercise of equality between his Muslim and non-Muslim subjects. He himself did not seem to have a particularly deep attachment to religion. He was well aware that his Christian and Jewish subjects, and even the Europeans who had pledged to serve him, were the best disposed to help him in the modernization of the country. Muhammad Ali did not doubt that it was necessary to turn to Europe to make Egypt a strong, prosperous, and modern country.

Muhammad Ali was, moreover, the Eastern monarch who sent the largest number of students to train or retrain in Europe, especially in France. However, he demanded that they be strictly supervised so that their stay did not detract from the prescribed purpose. For example, student groups were often accompanied by a religious instructor. Paradoxically, it was one of these instructors who had the greatest influence on the Egyptian thought: Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (1801–1873) who lived in France from 1826 to 1831. The other instructors are less known and probably exercised no influence.

In 1821, the famous printing press of Bulaq was founded, as Muhammad Ali had wished. It had a profound impact in Egypt and beyond. The list of his publications is impressive: it reflects the extent and nature of the modernization desired by Muhammad Ali. Most of the printed works were translated from French to Arabic or Turkish, some were even translated from Italian or Turkish into Arabic. Here are some examples of books translated during the reign of Muhammad 'Ali: *The Prince of Machiavelli* (translated from Italian), *Italian-Arabic Dictionary*, *Elements of Medical Science* (translated from Italian), *The Ottoman Administration* (translated from Turkish), al-Tahtawi *Travelogue in France* (translated into Turkish), *Travel to America*, *Travel to India*, *History of Greek Philosophers*, *Excerpt from the Memorial of St. Helena*, *History of the Kings of France*, *History of Charles XII*, *History of Charles V*, *History of the Empress Catherine II of Russia*, *History of the Russian Empire under Peter the Great*, *Morals and usages of nations*, *Anatomy of the human body*, *Diseases and education of children*, *Treaty of pharmacology*, *Treaty of the Veterinary art*, *Treatise on pathology*, *Treatise on physiology*, *Treatise on pests and quarantine*, *Treatment of scabies*, *Axioms of geometry*, *Course of algebra*, *Integral and differential calculus*, *Universal geography*, *Descriptive geometry*, *Rectilinear and spherical trigonometry*, *The art of silk dyeing*, *Mechanical treatise*, *Construction of machines*, *Warfare treaty*, *Code of discipline for naval troops*, *Regulations for the Cavalry*, *The Gunner's Handbook*, *Powder Manufacturing Treaty*, *The Arsenal and Ammunition of War*, *Principle of Military Art*, *Infantry Practice*, *Repair and*

Maintenance of Weapons, etc. No Arab country has known, throughout the nineteenth century, such intense activity in terms of translation and publishing. After Muhammad Ali, the printing house of Bulaq was rededicated to the publication of religious and literary works!

Muhammad Ali's military enterprises were the cause of the ultimate failure of his ambitions and the collapse of his rule. In 1808 he sent his son Ibrahim to eradicate Wahhabism in Arabia at the request of the *caliph*. In 1831 he sent his army to conquer Syria and Lebanon against the will of the *caliph* this time. His son Ibrahim ruled the region by allying himself with Prince Bashir Shihabi who was an enlightened man and a supporter of Enlightenment thought. A policy of equality between confessions and cults was then practiced. Paradoxically, it was rejected by the high dignitaries of religion, the European powers and the Ottoman *caliph* himself! Muhammad Ali's fatal mistake was to send his troops to confront the *caliph*'s armies. The latter received the support of the European powers and a motley alliance was sealed against Muhammad Ali, who was forced to abandon Syria and Lebanon. The conflict between Istanbul and Cairo continued from 1832 to 1840. It was under the threat of the English fleet that Muhammad Ali signed a treaty which imposed a drastic reduction of his army, which was one was the pillar of his regime. In addition, the price of cotton collapsed at a time when cotton was the largest Egyptian export. Thus, military drift was joined by the economic crisis. As a result, Egypt was trapped in a dead end.

3.3 The Tunis of Khayr al-Din (Kheireddin)

The Regency of Tunis had retained only a symbolic link with the *caliph* of Istanbul and the Beylical family which reigned in Tunis had granted itself a large autonomy in the management of the State. In order to preserve and consolidate this autonomy, Tunis refused then to apply the Ottoman reforms and preferred to make its own way. The ideal of a constitutional monarchy was preferred by the reformers. The chronicler Ibn Abi al-Diyaf (1804–1874) praised it in the introduction of his memorable chronicle entitled *Ithaf ahl al-zaman* (Present to the men of our time).[6] According to al-Diyaf, the constitutional monarchy represents a "right-middle" between the republic that leads to anarchy and absolute monarchy, which is a form of despotism. Hamuda Pasha, who ruled from 1782 to 1814, had already understood the urgency of a fundamental reform and had already turned to the two figures who continued to fascinate the thinkers of Tunis: Ibn Khaldun, the author of the *Muqaddima*, and Napoleon Bonaparte, for whom Hamuda had a particular admiration. Ahmad Bey (1837–1855) inherited the same sentiments, and it was above all with him that a real

[6] The chronicle was written in Arabic between 1862 and 1872 and was first printed in 1963–1966. A recent edition is available in Tunis, Ministry of Culture and Arab House of the Book, 2001. A partial translation was given by André Raymond, Tunis, Alif edition, 1994.

policy of modern reform was initiated. The figurehead of the Tunisian reform movement was none other than Vizier Khayr al-Din (1810–1890).

Indeed, Ahmad decided to modernize the army which was one of the major pillars of his power. A military school was founded to serve this purpose in 1840, and European instructors were invited to instruct its pupils. This school offered, for the first time, the opportunity to study European languages while participating timidly in the simplification and modernization of Arabic grammar and literature. Paradoxically, this military school had little influence on the future of the army, because it was in no way comparable to that of the *caliph* of Istanbul or the Khedive of Cairo. It was rather in the field of the diffusion of new ideas in civilization that this school proved to be most useful; indeed, some of his pupils actively participated in the reform movement. Ahmad quickly gave up his dream of Empire and his desire to build a powerful army, after he officially visited France in 1846. This visit was the first to make a Muslim head of state in a European country. Ahmad asked to visit Bonaparte's grave; he was also granted a military parade and a visit to a weapons factory. This trip allowed him to experience the contrast which then separated a modern State from a Regency stuck in the medieval era.

Ahmad did not give up his dreams of greatness. Back in Tunis, he inaugurated an ambitious program of modernization according to a model of centralized administrative power. He accelerated the modernization of the army and devoted a large part of the budget to it. He undertook sumptuous work which ended up costing an economy in difficulty, beset by cholera and scarcity. To cope with this situation, he sent Khayr al-Din to borrow from European banks, which allowed him to stay in Europe for more than 2 years to perfect Moliere's language and to draw inspiration from Europe to develop a reform program for the regency of Tunis and for the entire Muslim world. He recorded this program in a work published in 1867 under the title *Aqwam al-masalik* (Essay on the reforms necessary to the Muslim States). Ahmad's successor, Muhammad Bey (1855–1859), was more realistic and abandoned the ambition of having a powerful army, convinced that the regency did not have the means. He endowed the capital with a municipal council, which was the first "democratic" experience in the regency. He repealed the vexatious and discriminatory provisions then in force with regard to the Jews. The most important initiative, however, was the promulgation in 1857 of the "Protection Pact" (*Ahd al-aman*), which established full equality among all the citizens of the Regency, irrespective of their religious or ethnic affiliation. The "Pact" contained the outline of the Hümayun Decree, but it was written in the language of the reformist elite of Tunis, with the intention that this "Pact" be his and that it owed nothing to the Ottoman Sultan.

From this promulgation, Tunis seemed to want to compete with Istanbul in terms of reforms: it even took the lead through certain initiatives, such as writing a constitution in Tunis in 1871, which did not occur in Istanbul until 1876. This Tunisian constitution that was born under the reign of Muhammad al-Sadiq Bey (1859–1882) was the first of its kind in the entire Muslim world: it even included the principle of the distinction of the three powers along with the principle of the equality between all citizens which had already been proclaimed by the "Protection Pact." The Bey was supposed to represent only the executive power and was thus separate from the

judicial power, while the legislature was made up of a "higher council" which would take the place of a parliament with limited powers. On the other hand, this constitution spoke neither on the nature of the relation between the Regency and the Ottoman caliphate nor on the relation of the religion to the State.

As was the case for the Ottoman Empire, this constitution remained unenforced and was even suspended in 1864. However, the promulgation of this constitution generated a dynamic that developed over the next several years and created pathways to prepare more modern legislation. It has, moreover, sparked passionate debates about the state of Muslim societies. This in fact led to some bold reforms for the spirit of the times despite the very unfavorable context. We must not forget that the opening of a local medieval market to European products could only lead to disastrous effects, which was added on to bad harvests, leading to a crisis for the economy and the State budget which pushed the peasants to revolt. However, judicial reforms have paved the way for more modern legislation. The army was deployed throughout the country to better reflect the centralizing nature of power. Incentives were introduced to encourage exports. Religious property was systematically listed and placed under the control of the state. Public financial management was subject to collegial control. Taxation was reformed, but the taxes levied on farmers and craftsmen continued to increase. An effort was also made to improve the quality of education and libraries; the Sadiqi College was inaugurated in 1875 to provide modern education, which would become nursery of future leaders of the Tunisian national movement, such as President Habib Bourguiba.

The linchpin of all these reforms was Khayr al-Din. The latter had surrounded himself with companions and councilors who remained faithful to him until his dismissal from the post of Grand Vizier in 1877. The same Khayr al-Din was promoted the following year to the same function, but in Istanbul! And here his success proved to be clearly contestable. The thought of Khayr al-Din was recorded in the program book cited above. The author hoped to publish the book in Arabic, Turkish, French and English so that it could serve as a reference in the debates on reforms to be introduced in Muslim states.

The European presence in Tunis became important and explains, in part, why Tunis could only go so far. However, the support of European consuls and immigrant communities for the reforms was not impartial. As the French director of the Military School of Tunis wrote to his Minister of War in Paris in 1862: "When the Constitution was promulgated, most of the Europeans either ignored what it contained or were seduced by this right of property which had been denied them for so long. They thought they saw open the field of advantageous transactions before them and they neglected the article that submits them to the laws of the country, believing it to be dead letter."[7] The Third Republic, by imposing its protectorate on Tunisia in 1881, did not consider it necessary to reinstate the constitution of 1861 that had been suspended a few years earlier, yet it was the first constitution ever to

[7] Note from Colonel Campenon, published by Ali Chenoufi in *Minister Khéreddine and his contemporaries*, Tunis, 1990. p. 54.

be known in the history of the Muslim world and was inspired by the French Enlightenment!

3.4 The Fatwa Wars

It is clear from this brief overview that a vast movement of global reform was inaugurated in the Arab and Muslim world in the nineteenth century, even before the European protectorates intervened (and, *a fortiori*, later US pressures!). Has it ended in failure? Are we stuck in this failure or could we resume the reform with greatersuccess? Did the European protectorates accelerate the reform movement or, on the contrary, did they give rise to a traumatic identity crisis? It is difficult to answer these serious questions in a definite way. What is more important for this research is what role religion has played in these initial reforms. Popular Islam resigned itself to seeing, in the new situation of Islam, the harbinger of the end of time: Muslims would take over other nations in the afterlife, unless God decides to intervene directly in history and to annihilate by his own strength the impious of all kinds, as formerly he had destroyed the Pharaohs to liberate the Jewish people. *Jihad* was certainly invoked in this perspective, but it was not aimed at restoring the greatness of Islam here below: its vocation was to allow any disturbed conscience to hasten its deliverance and salvation. Rather than resigning himself to punishment, self-sacrifice (martyrdom) was a kind of personal deliverance, which testified to a longing for eternity. The world was then sacrificed for the world of the hereafter, the first being the one reserved for the ungodly and the second the one promised to the faithful.

Elite Islam was part of a more realistic and opportunistic culture because it could not take such a tragic view of things. The eschatological expectation of deliverance has become secularized, taking the form of an ideology of struggle for a "renaissance" (*nahda*) which assumed, at one and the same time, borrowing from modern Europe and restoring the grandeur of the past. It is here and in the near future that Muslims should rebuild their Empire or their States. Thus, the idea of reform was born to constitute the urban alternative to the dogma of the end of time. The "Renaissance" of the Arab-Muslim world expressed the hope of a near future that would restore the "normal" situation of things and would see Muslims take over the others, or at least find themselves in a situation of equality with them. To regain the greatness of Islam, it was necessary to accept reforms, but to accept these also meant reducing the role of religion in the city and the importance of the *ulema* in the social body. However, the new social, political, and cultural context allowed for the possibility of another Islam that could reconcile simultaneously the desire for greatness and the necessity of the change, the assumption of a dream of Muslim Empire, and the ambition of a modern State. Remaining within the framework of an "old-fashioned" relationship between the state and religion, this elite Islam tried to endorse the reforms carried out by those in power and to provide the means to circumvent the religious discourse so that it does not raise opposition to these reforms.

The language of this religious reform from above retained its classical support, the *fatwa*. A *fatwa* is a religious decree issued by authorized scholars. There is no council in Islam and the value of a *fatwa* depends solely on the authority of the one who issues it. Whatever support it receives from the political authority, it cannot suffice to give authority to its *fatwa*; it is still necessary that it be endorsed by its peers. Moreover, it should not openly oppose the dominant religious imaginary. And issuing a *fatwa* is an extremely dangerous exercise. In its content, a *fatwa* must establish an analogous relationship between a new "case" and an old "case" that religious authorities had already classified as to the scale of legal qualifications. Indeed, classical Muslim law has classified each act of human conduct according to a scale comprising five qualifications: the obligatory (*wajib*), the forbidden (*haram*), the recommended (*mandub*), the reprehensible (*makruh*) and the permissible (*mubah*). A *fatwa* must therefore decide on the qualification to be given to a new type of conduct. The choice of the standard case on which the analogy will rest is decisive for the result of the *fatwa*. For example, it was discussed whether the introduction of astronomy into education was allowed. Some religious authorities saw an analogy between scientific astronomy and pagan astrology that Islam had originally fought, hence their refusal. Others established an analogy between astronomy itself and the techniques of locating the direction of prayer: these techniques required knowledge of the position of the stars, and their acquisition was therefore strongly encouraged by other religious authorities.

The casuistic character of the *fatwa* exercise allowed to affirm one thing and its opposite. This is not to say that the *fatwa* should be suspected of being a gratuitous and anarchic act. The value of a *fatwa* is measured according to the conditions of its reception and not the qualities of its emission. In view of a reader today, a *fatwa* is a text expounding an opinion, and all *fatwas* are equal, but from the point of view of the reader of the time, a *fatwa* is a speech, meaning a text loaded with a strong social connotation.

Indeed, the *fatwa* is not only the affirmation of a content, it is also an exercise of authority: it would have to benefit from an illocutionary force, to use a term of linguistic pragmatics. It is not enough to declare a session open for it to be open, as Austin taught us.[8] Similarly, it is not enough for someone to say that a case is lawful or unlawful for his opinion to gain authority. A *faqih* must first reflect a certain balance between the sword and the crescent. If he puts himself in a position radically opposed to political authority, threatening to break the social balance, he risks losing his notoriety. If he is suspected of being subordinated to political authority, his credibility and faith to religious prescriptions will be questioned. The most official of the *fatwas* could be short-circuited by a *fatwa* coming from a marginal authority. The best guarantee that a *faqih* can offer is not to get too far from the dominant religious thought. Thus, any *fatwa* often faces a formidable dilemma: by renewing itself it loses its notoriety, and by wanting to reflect the spirit of the *umma* as much as possible, it reinforces the conservatism.

[8] Austin J.L., *How to do Things with Words*?, 1962., Seuil, 1970.

Grasping these nuances is very important to understand why reformist governments were struggling to bring religious leaders into their reform initiatives. Today, people complain about the increased role these authorities play in the daily lives of Muslims, but reformist governments found themselves in a different situation. They felt betrayed by these same authorities who preferred to stay away from a debate that went beyond them, to content themselves with living in the closed universe of classical education that ignored the changes of the modern world. This was the *taqlid* (imitation of the old authorities), so decried by the reformers. However, this *taqlid* was precisely a sort of de facto separation between the spiritual and the temporal. It is as if the *faqih* allowed the Prince to fend for himself in the face of a new world which was becoming more and more difficult to understand only by way of analogy with the world of the ancients.

The nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century saw the multiplication of hundreds of *fatwas*, ranging from very serious to completely ridiculous, because conservatives and reformers were opposed on all subjects: the natural sciences, modern medicine, vaccination, chemical drugs, travel on steamers, "quarantine," bicycle, telegraph, printing of the Qur'an, the parliamentary system, banking interests, the burials of saints, etc.

3.5 The Religion of Publicists

Another very important factor to consider is the introduction of printing in the Muslim world. Victor Hugo had imagined, in his work *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), a wonderful scene in which a Renaissance scholar contemplated the Notre-Dame Cathedral while holding in his hand a printed book. Glancing sadly from book to Church, he uttered his famous saying, "Alas, he said, this will kill that." Hugo, a notorious anticlerical, could not refrain from expressing this diatribe: "It was the cry of the prophet," he wrote, "which already hears the noise and swarms of emancipated humanity, which sees in the future intelligence undermining faith, opinion dethroning belief, the world-shaking Rome. Prognosis of the philosopher who sees human thought, volatilized by the press, evaporate from the theological container."[9]

The influence of the printing press on Islamic religious thought was not less important than its influence in Europe. It would not be an exaggeration to argue that the delays in modern Islamic thought is largely due to its delay in integrating printing. However, this influence has had unintended consequences. In modern Islam, printing killed scholasticism, leaving the Qur'an alone to express the presence of God in the city. Islam found itself, consequently, in the situation of a religion without Theology, that is to say without a science which mediates between the sacred text and the believing man. This particular relationship between the sacred and the printing press calls for multiple analyzes. Suffice it to mention here the change of

[9] Hugo Victor, *Notre-Dame of Paris*, book V, act II.

status of the Qur'an following the emergence of printing. As Chateaubriand said, "a book that changes is a book that remains the same, while everything changes around it."

In Islam, scholasticism is the long period during which religious knowledge has been institutionalized, frozen, and then ritualized. It is difficult to give specific dates, as situations differ across centuries and regions. It can be said, however, that there is a scholastic system that emerged from the eighth century of the Hegira, meaning the fourteenth century AD. It continued to train and nurture Muslim thought until the nineteenth century. The decline of this scholasticism at the end of this last century allowed for the emergence of a new type of scholar. To designate it, one can use the antiquated term of "publicist," since it corresponds this type of scholar who accompanied the printing revolution in the Arab-Muslim world. Doesn't the word "publicist" in Old French refer to someone who wrote for the "public"? It is in this general and deliberately ambiguous sense that it should be used to designate this new type of scholar.

The scholastic knowledge was not centered on the Qur'an alone, even though it claimed to be a kind of mega-exegesis of the "Book of God," because it was then only a retrospective projection on his evolution. It was, in fact, a body of knowledge accumulated over centuries in all matters relating to the "religious." In doing so, scholastic knowledge was not based on a First Text, but on a living tradition that had generated a rich heritage. While the Qur'an was omnipresent in the daily life of Muslims, it was mainly known as a liturgical text. In the mosques-universities, it was not taught as an object of knowledge in itself. Instead, it taught the art of recitation (*tartil*). The Qur'anic commentary (*tafsir*) and the so-called Qur'anic sciences were mostly secondary subjects. A Qur'anic commentary as famous as that of Tabari (third/ninth century) had almost disappeared from circulation before being rediscovered in the nineteenth century. The basic teachings were those of Islamic law (*fiqh*), dogmatic Theology (*kalam*) and language sciences (*ulum al-lugha*). There was no need to return to the Founding Text. The still living tradition had no need to revisit its real or supposed foundations, as it progressed through commentaries and glosses on its own production, creating a heritage that seemed to be an uninterrupted accumulation of knowledge.

The first serious breach in this edifice was the consequence of Wahhabism's appearance, as already explained above. Like the Kitab al-tawhid (Treatise on Divine Unity) of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, which is the founding book of the doctrine, the Wahhabi doctrine does not abide by scholastic rules. It does not claim, for her, the authority of the scholastic tradition, but refers to the founding text, the prophetic tradition and the writings of the "fathers" of the doctrine. In other words, the famous "door of *ijtihad*" closed by scholasticism was opened again by Wahhabism, but in a more radically conservative sense. For scholasticism was the product of religious institutions that had made compromises with the world of their time. Fundamentalism, on the other hand, is an attitude that seeks to reduce the world of its time to the Scriptures and their recommendations. The theological-political project of Wahhabism was to break with the scholastic tradition in the name of a previous tradition, that of the "Founding Fathers," or *salaf*. This project

aimed to discredit the recognized centers of religious authority. The controversy over *ijtihad*, which took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is not synonymous with religious modernization, quite the contrary. The return to the founding text, far from generating positions more compatible with the spirit of the time, then implies greater conservatism.

The problem is therefore very complex. Indeed, the policy adopted by the powerful reformers in the Muslim world was also based on the idea of *ijtihad* to justify the introduction of new practices inspired by the West. However, they could not accept the type of *ijtihad* advocated by Wahhabism. How, then, did al-Tahtawi, the thinker and counselor of the Khedives of Egypt, see things? In an epistle entitled *al-Qawl al-sadid al-ijtihad wa-l-taqlid* (*The so-called correct way of personal effort and imitation*), he proposed to distinguish two kinds of *ijtihad*: an absolute ijtihad (*mutlaq*) and a limited *ijtihad* (*muqayyad*).[10] Admittedly, this was an old scholastic distinction; however, in the context of the time, it took on a new and unprecedented meaning. Indeed, this solution made it possible to introduce new practices according to *ijtihad*, but without returning to the Founding Text. The so-called limited *ijtihad* was a kind of personal reflection within the tradition, which broadened the scope of the tradition to offer a wider range of legal opinions. The role of the *ulema* was, therefore, to expose all the potentialities of the tradition and it was up to the holders of power to then choose the legal opinion most suited to the needs of the *umma* (community), given that they are the responsible here in this community. The limited *ijtihad* implied that one does not leave the limits fixed by the tradition. Thus, this reformist *ijtihad* was opposed to the radical *ijtihad* of Wahhabism, which broke with tradition in the name of the sole authority of the Qur'an.[11]

The second breach was opened by the printing press. This one participated in the questioning of the old theologico-political order.[12] It was founded during the Ottoman Empire in 1727, at the time known as "the Tulip Revolution," during the first attempts to modernize the army. Later, during the so-called Tanzimat period inaugurated by Abdul-Mejid, the role of the printing press became decisive. In Egypt, one of Muhammad Ali's greatest decisions was precisely to introduce printing in 1821–1822. The printing press was introduced into the Regency of Tunis in 1861, the date corresponding to the peak of the reforms carried out at the instigation of the reformist minister Khayr al-Din (holding various positions from 1860 to 1877).

---

[10] This treatise is included in the complete works of al-Tahtawi, *al-Amal al-kamila*, ed. Mr. Umara. Beirut, 1973–1981, t. 5, pp. 9–35.

[11] The classic work on this period is that of Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798–1939, op. cit. to note 3.

[12] On the introduction of printing in the Muslim world, see: Gdoura Wahid, *The Beginning of the Arab Printing in Istanbul and Syria* (1706–1787), Tunis, 1985; Sabat Khalil, *Tarikh al-tiba'a fi al-Sharq al-Arabi*, Cairo, 1958; Abduh Ibrahim, *Tarikh al-tiba'a wa-l-sahafa fi Misr*, Cairo, 1949; Shayal Jamal al-Din, *Tarikh al-tarjama wa-l-haraka al-thaqafiyya fi asr Muhammad Ali*, Cairo, 1951.

The Muslim printing houses did not give priority to the printing of theological and religious works. The printing press in Istanbul had even been banned from printing such books at first. The printing press in Tunis specialized in printing official documents. The printing press in Tunis specialized in printing official documents. The printing press in Cairo began to print religious works in large numbers only after the era of Muhammad ʻAli. Therefore, for decades, none of the printed works were directly related to the Qur'an, the Qur'an itself was not printed, out of respect, nor were the authoritative Qur'anic commentaries, nor were the main works of "Qur'anic sciences" nor the collections of hadiths (the sayings of the Prophet). By way of example, the Qur'anic commentary on Ibn Kathir, which contains only four volumes, was only printed in around 1882. In 1901, Egypt published a mediocre edition which contained on the sidelines (in the manner of manuscripts) another Qur'anic commentary, that of al-Nisaburi. It was not until 1912 that the most imposing Qur'anic commentary was published in Egypt (edition of Bulaq), that of Tabari, entitled *Jami al-Bayan*.

The state reforms, which continued in the nineteenth century from the beginning to the end of the seventies, had thus allowed the emergence of a type of scholar who did not completely renounce the old processes of scholastic writing, but which was beginning to adapt to the printing press to the new needs of society. Three tasks were then considered priorities: first, the popularization of the tradition and the widening of its borders in order to allow a greater choice in the legal-theological opinions and to retain those which seemed more in conformity with the spirit of the time; second, the popularization of modern knowledge through the translation of scientific and technical works from the French or Italian language, but rarely from English; thirdly, the preservation of classical legitimacy and the balance between power and knowledge, by avoiding a sort of general questioning of tradition, either under the guise of a return to the sources or under the guise of a radical Westernization.

Two different but convergent strategies were proposed. On the one hand, Abdul-Hamid II's strategy was to strengthen the religious character of the caliphate in order to obtain greater Muslim adherence to his authority. In order to "rake broadly" and circumvent the religious and ethnic diversity of Muslims, he believed it necessary to put the Qur'an back in the foreground to be the cement of their unity. The second strategy was that of the "second-generation" publicists, who were no longer the advisers to the holders of power but who expressed the voice of an Islamic civil society. The latter also sought recourse to the Qur'an as a primordial source to strengthen the unity of the Muslims, albeit without passing through allegiance to the caliphate of Istanbul. These publicists, including the adventurous and best representative Jamal al-Din al-Afghan had a sharper awareness of the difficulty represented by scholasticism for the unity of Muslims, in that it conveyed a static vision of religion and thus consolidated the division of Muslims into multiple dogmatic and legal schools. The "second generation" publicists wanted to found an Islamic proto-nationalism, a nationalism without a specific territory, which would be based on the simple belonging to the Muslim culture. They needed to propagate an idealized and abstract vision of Islam, which presupposed the renunciation of the very foundations of scholasticism. It is an effort of this kind that was continued from the circles

organized by al-Afghani in Cairo in 1871, until the publication of Muhammad Abduh's *R. Tawhid* in 1892. The religion of the "publicists" took with these two politico-religious leaders, a new turning point.

With this philosophy, religion metamorphosed into identity. The Qur'an became an identity maker for millions of disoriented Muslims and engaged them in the path of sacrifice to preserve their existence. The "publicist" became the standard-bearer of Islam, thus opposing the professor of scholasticism who was now devoted to a marginal role. In doing so, a Muslim "public opinion" came to express itself, its attachment to religious knowledge being less rigorous than would have been required by scholasticism, but its religious conscience flourished thanks to the printing press and the media which fed now the public debate. And this "public opinion" grew its audience as the press and print spread. The religion of "publicists" thus created its own public and dethroned classical scholasticism.

The religion of the "publicists" was a religion of identity. It should be noted that the identity consciousness was affirmed during a period of immense chaos. The press was the very laboratory of this identity because it was the privileged place of public debate. The readers of newspapers and printed books were substituted for those of the treatises of Scholasticism: the language remained religious, certainly, but without the rigor of scholasticism. The threat to identity was the only leitmotif of this debate. The reference to "chaos" is because there was not, strictly speaking, a structured thought that would have been substituted for another, but rather a religious effervescence that had dethroned a secular organization of knowledge religious. The claimed identity remained rather vague, hesitating between a dominant "oriental" identity (*rabita sharqiyya*), an Arab identity (*rabita arabiyya*) and a Muslim identity (*rabita islamiyya*).

At the time when printing was still rare, the press limited, and the publicists few, these three were all scrambled. And it was at this time that the "publicist" religion reached its peak. A sort of new corporation had taken shape, showing solidarity and defending its right to influence the public debate. The "publicist" religion was thus at the crossroads of two movements strongly dependent on the emergence of printing in the Arab world: Christian anti-confessionalism and Islamic anti-scholasticism.

Europe did not go through a similar experience when Gutenberg invented the printing press: it waited more than a century to challenge and replace the old class of "scribes." In modern Muslim societies, mutation occurred within one or two generations. The urban *ulema* class was also a victim of the economic transformations that made it lose its privileged status. It was normal for it to lose its doctrinal magisterium exercised over the dominant opinion, the Muslim *umma*. The regression of the reformed *fatwa* was also a sign of its decline as much as the expression of protest on the part of this class against the loss of its influence. It now saw its intellectual world and its way of life, both secular, lose their importance. It finally realized that the project of a concordance between Islam and modernity was much more complicated than the game of analogies on which the skill of the *faqih* in its *fatwas* was measured.

The printing press has thus engendered a new kind of scholar in the Muslim world. The reformers were its unexpected children: the Egyptian al-Tahtawi (1801–1873) and the Tunisian Khayr al-Din (1822–1890) are the most illustrious examples. They did not intend to reform Islam strictly speaking, but wanted it to avoid opposing the reforms they deemed necessary for Muslim societies, or even prepare Islam to be able to support them. Their philosophy could be perfectly translated into these terms: the *faqihs* should issue fatwas to legitimize the introduction of new modes of organization of the city by political authority, and their role stop there. They can then continue to live, if they want, according to their multi-secular mental universe.

Were al-Tahtawi and Khayr al-Din aware of the real incompatibility that existed between the world conveyed by the *faqihs* and the modern world they had known from sight? Or did they prefer to silence oppositions that might jeopardize their position? To choose one of the two answers would be to bring them to trial. In any case, it is obvious that they could not have, from this incompatibility, an awareness as acute as that of the following generations.

No matter how hard we look, we will find no trace of a real quest for modernity in nineteenth-century Islam, outside the context of the challenge it faced through contact with Europe. This is why the problem can be posed neither in terms of continuity nor in terms of rupture, but rather in terms of a paradigm shift. In this second period of modern Islamic history, the reform was motivated by the need for Islam to start a new cycle to protect itself from European hegemony. The only way to protect itself was to reorganize the city by borrowing from the European model itself, except from a religious mindset (in any case, modern Europe presented itself as a secular model). To avoid the opposition of conservative minds, it was necessary to resort to mimetic outbidding: to imagine an Islam "of grandeur" which would have been abandoned by his own and which Europe would have inherited to develop it. It is unlikely that al-Tahtawi or Khayr al-Din really believed that modern Europe was merely repeating the original precepts of Islam. However, we should rather see in this process the very expression of religious reason when it apprehends reality. It is always as if it has been "recycled" from the prism of the eternal and the original sense. This is a structure of collective thought to which any thinker adheres more or less consciously and which he must consider as speech aiming to influence the collective thought of his time.

Contrary to popular belief, al-Tahtawi was not the first Arab, let alone the first Muslim, to visit a European country and deliver his impressions. However, his famous travel writings, translated to French under the title *The Gold of Paris*, was the most remarkable travelogue of modern Islam.[13] The problem of religion was not directly posed, but the general spirit of his description of France was painted with sympathy, which was undeniably favorable to certain forms of societal secularization and liberal modernization. Al-Tahtawi particularly emphasized the following: to speak of "scientists" in France is not to designate people versed in religious

[13] Translated by the late Anouar Louca, Sindbabd, 1988.

sciences, for modern knowledge is knowledge independent of religion. And al-Tahtawi regretted that this kind of knowledge was missing from all Muslim universities.

He informs his reader that knowledge is not the only domain that has been detached from religion: politics, in turn, has been secularized. A modern regime is a regime based on a constitution and not on a religion: no reader can fail to draw this conclusion by reading the translation given by al-Tahtawi of the articles of the Charter of June 14, 1814 promulgated by Louis XVIII. The appendix he wrote to relate the events that led to this constitutional reform is even more eloquent: "Here is a prosperous country that nonetheless revolts against his king because it refuses to sell its freedom." Al-Tahtawi explained that two currents were then disputing French political life: the pro-clerical monarchist movement and the liberal movement of enlightened thinkers. Certainly, he often avoided taking the responsibility of drawing conclusions: he left it to the reader to understand the unspoken. It is clear, however, that this acknowledged correlation between modern knowledge, of which al-Tahtawi wanted to be the champion, and modern politics based on the constitution and liberties is the strong sign of his unwavering commitment to a reform to adapt it to the liberal and modern model.

However, al-Tahtawi could not conceive of such a reform outside the traditional schemas of power-sharing, both political and cultural, between the religious and state institution. On this subject, it is enough to consult, for example, his *al-Murshid al-amin* (The faithful guide for the education of girls and boys), the first modern work to have proposed a reform of Muslim education. This book aimed at making education the vehicle for a general reform of Islamic societies. Al-Tahtawi's conception of it was radically binary and rather simplistic: it was necessary to combine religious education with "civic" education (*madani*), which should encompass all modern, scientific, historical, and philosophical knowledge. The sources of knowledge, as we know, are reason and revelation. And "profane" knowledge is nothing new in the history of Islam: according to al-Tahtawi, Muslims had developed it in its periods of greatness before neglecting it in its period of decadence. Europe, on its own behalf, had recovered and enriched it. All modern knowledge was therefore indebted to the Arab heritage. As a result, there was no inconvenience in repeating it, especially since it could not be feared that it opposed the convictions of believers because it belonged to a different sphere of religious knowledge.

All of al-Tahtawi's thinking was based on this "dualism": to be a citizen of a nation-state and to rise to supranational Islam, to accept the hierarchy of the sexes and to grant women the right to education, to remain faithful to classical religious education and to introduce a modern education, to preserve the four classical legal schools and to institute a modern national law, etc. This "cumulative" spirit was also expressed in a neoclassical style, which reintroduced then, in its expression, the kind of reference recognized to the *adab* of medieval Islam.

When the need arose and some old convictions had to be shaken up, al-Tahtawi was content to resort to a well-known approach, the so-called "legitimate tricks" (*hiyal sha'iyya*). Thus, for example, it was not necessary to go very far to solve the acute problem of polygamy, for it suffices to recall that Islam has, as a condition, the

obligation to practice fairness between wives. Since this equity is always difficult to guarantee, polygamy should be considered as a very rare situation.

The religious problem was not tackled head-on either in Khayr al-Din's previously mentioned book *Aqwam al-Masalik*. However, strangely enough, this book has the structure of a *fatwa*. The question was whether it was permissible to draw inspiration from European organizations to restore the greatness of Islam. As someone without *faqih* status, Khayr al-Din endeavored to collect what had been said by the great *faqihs* and the other authorities of authority in Islam. He supported his conclusions with inductive reasoning and the memory of his stays in European countries. Here there is the whole classical panoply of knowledge: the *naql* ("sayings" of authority), the *aql* (reasoning), the *iyan* (testimony), all concurring then to support the same conclusion, namely the justification of what the author called the *iqtibas* (the loan to Europe).

As a rhetorical statesman, Khayr al-Din expressed the problem in the clearest way: if we as Muslims want to catch up and guard against the hegemony of Europe, there is no other way than to inspire ourselves from Europe itself and to introduce into the land of Islam the elements which have made its power and prosperity. Two conditions then proved necessary: the limitation of the authority of the holders of power and the relative flexibility of religious thought. Khayr al-Din had no other ambition than to see the *faqihs* recognize the validity of his approach to declare lawful any loan made to Europe that does not oppose the Muslim faith. Khayr al-Din thus emitted a sort of unauthorized *fatwa*, thinking thus to provoke authorized *fatwas* that would corroborate his approach. It should be added that his ideas echoed reforms in Istanbul, Cairo, and Tunis. His book also intended to support the Tanzimat movement that had prevailed in Istanbul with the adoption of the Ottoman Reform Edict of 1856. The book appeared a decade later and could not fail to take up the controversies that had been triggered around the promulgation of this decree considered by some as opposing Muslim law. By avoiding glossing over the opposition itself, Khayr al-Din emphasized the pragmatic character of the reform. According to him, it was not necessary to get lost in theological discussions and advanced hermeneutics; it was rather simply important to organize a division of tasks that had to be respected: the power-bearer was responsible for deciding the necessary reforms and the *faqihs*, guardians of orthodoxy, had to support these reform policies and convince the people of the conformity of these with religion. Better still, it was incumbent on them to put pressure on the holder of the power itself to engage resolutely in the path of reform, the counterpart to allegiance due to power, in the classical political theory of Islam in light of its ability to defend Islam and Muslims. All necessary things that could only be possible through the proposed reforms should be declared legitimate.

3.6 Confused Succession

Khayr al-Din, at the end of his life in 1884, lived isolated in Istanbul after leaving Tunis. In 1880, the Sultan Abdul-Hamid II had entrusted him with the post of Grand Vizier, but he remained in that position for less than a year. When the echo came to him from the creation in Paris of a pan-Islamic association and a newspaper called *al-Urwa al-wuthqa*, he gave it his moral and financial support. His ex-right-hand man, General Husayn, and other reformists in Tunis had helped finance this project. Egyptians and Lebanese-Syrians who had fled their countries were "the linchpin" of this reformist international. It was at the same time the end of the reforms promoted by the States and the beginning of the reform carried by a pan-Islamic "civil society."

This adjective "pan-Islamic" must be understood in a "civilizational" and not religious sense. The international reformist in question was not necessarily Muslim in practice: Islam constituted a cultural heritage and a sociological identity. "Pan-Islamism" served, in this transitional phase, as a substitute for "Ottomanism." We must distinguish between a pan-Islamism supported by the Ottoman *caliph* Abdul-Hamid II and a pan-Islamism which chose to separate itself from the tutelage of the State, convinced that the governmental reforms promoted belonged to a past stage and that they had all ended in a certain failure. Later, the idea of Arab-ness (*uruba*) was substituted for this militant and identity-based pan-Islamism, which was then being detached from its unifying character and having taken on a more explicit religious connotation. The "civilizational" pan-Islamism of the nineteenth century was the result of two parallel and distinct movements: the rise of anti-conformism in circles of Muslim worship and the development of anti-confessionalism in the milieus of Eastern Christian worship.

The causes which led to the reduction of the prestige of Muslim scholasticism have already been mentioned, and here we should also say a few words about Arab Christian anti-confessionalism. The religious crisis of Arab Christians goes back to the quarrels triggered by the arrival of the evangelical missions in the East in the nineteenth century. It was around the problems raised by the printing press that these quarrels took shape: the printing works were, in fact, the means of combat par excellence between Jesuits and Evangelicals in the East.[14] The first printed works were controversial texts between two parties. In addition to the strictly dogmatic aspect of these polemics, they make it possible to understand what was the consequence of this debate on the perception of religion in general. Going together with the evolution of the printing press, this debate allowed the emergence of an elite literature who found themselves around a new ideal, that of a "non-confessional religiosity." On this occasion, we observe an unprecedented movement of "inter-faith transfer": the Maronite Faris al-Shidyaq (1804–1887) converted to Protestantism then to Islam, Protestantism welcomed the Orthodox Mikhaïl Mushaqa (1800–1888) and the Catholic Butrus al-Bustani (1819–1883). Georges

[14] Cheiko Louis, *Tarikh al-tiba'a fi l-Mashriq*, Beirut, 1986 (collection of articles published in 1900).

Zaydan (1861–1914) preferred agnosticism. Several authors have been excommunicated or banished from their community, such as Shibli Shumayyil (1860–1917), Louis Sabunji (1833–1931), a former seminarian in Rome, and Amin al-Rayhani (1876–1940). Farah Antun (1874–1922) proposed to propagate French secularism, etc. All these Arab Christian figures were prominent figures of the Arab-Muslim *nahda* (Renaissance) of the nineteenth century. The meeting between these wondering Christians and anti-conformist reform-minded Muslims led to the emergence of a bold public debate and the introduction of new ideas into it.

The most famous manifestation of this rapprochement between "anti-confessionist" Arab Christians and Arab anti-conformist Muslims took place in Cairo, around 1871. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani had settled there at the invitation of the Grand Vizier Egypt. Although considered as belonging to the class of *ulemas*, Jamal al-Din had not tried to join the mosque-university of al-Azhar; on the contrary, he had initiated himself into Freemasonry! He was accompanied by young, unconventional youth, the closest to him being Abduh and Adib Ishaq. We have already talked a lot about the former. Abduh was a turbulent student of religious schools and an Asharite detached from the teaching of his university. It was al-Afghani who was able to channel his intellectual energies and to initiate him to societal issues, both old and modern, that he could not envisage by his social milieu and the poor training offered to him by religious schools. As for Adib Ishaq (1856–1884), born in Damascus in the Catholic Armenian community, he had been trained by the Jesuits in Beirut. He was then passionate about liberal ideas and began to disseminate them through a newspaper he created himself, *al-Taqaddum* (Progress). He polemicized against the Jesuits on certain religious problems, before spending some time in Paris to perfect his French. It was in the Masonic circles of Egypt that al-Afghani met him and chose him to be his spokesman, helping him to create another newspaper, *Misr* (Egypt), to propagate his ideas.

The trio of al-Afghani, Abduh, and Ishaq (to which some 20 other scholars, including Jews, had joined) thus inaugurated a new philosophy which was expressed through the press, translation and publishing. The desired reform was then a return to the "true religion," the latter being one: Muslim and Christian, Catholic and Protestant, Sunni and Shia. It was not a syncretism, but rather a mystical vision of religious truth. The one God would have manifested himself to his creatures in various representations, according to an ancient mystical thesis. It has been said previously that the movement inaugurated by al-Afghani and Abduh was not inspired by Salafism, but rather mysticism and *falsafism* (inspired by medieval philosophy: *falsafa*). This spirit of 1871 was deliberately disfigured, to the extent that it is commonplace to repeat that the ideas of religious reform in modern Islam were of Salafi inspiration. In fact, the dominant representation of reform cannot actually see things differently. The reform, in this case, is a return to the sources, or the *salafs* (the ancestors). The nineteenth century could only be perceived through the prism of what has happened many times during the secular history of Islam.

Yet the difference is clear between a return to *salafs*, in the Wahhabi sense, and the return to the old "oriental" dream of a true and unique religion, within which all believers would come together beyond the diversity of their confessions. In this

case, it is not a question of a return to *salafs*, but of a quest for and a return to the unique God, so much sought after by Eastern humanity. It is no longer a question of the schema of the simple religion of Wahhabism, nor of a religion dependent on state liberalism; it is a liberal religion because it is based on the individual conscience of each believer. It is anti-sectarian because it ignores community belonging in favor of an individual positioning to reach and live the spiritual truth of all.

The new generation of Muslim reformers no longer wanted to be content with issuing *fatwas* to support state reforms, they intended to set themselves up as political leaders. Al-Afghani and his followers participated, to a large extent, in the project of setting up a "patriotic party" in Egypt which advocated equality between Muslims and Christians. Several relatives of al-Afghani, including Abduh, had actively participated in the indigenous revolt against the Turkish oligarchy in 1881–1882. This revolt had failed – al-Afghani, who had been expelled from Egypt a few months earlier, gathered some of his followers in Paris and founded the famous anti-colonial newspaper *al-Urwa al-wuthqa*.

We cannot overlook the impact of colonization on the development of modern Muslim thought. This impact has been rather negative, in that the colonial confrontation made the safeguarding of identity a priority over any critical revision of the supposed foundations of identity. Cairo and Tunis, which had undertaken the boldest reforms and had been inspired by courage from the West, had been occupied by foreign forces, Tunis by the French in 1881 and Cairo by the British in 1882. Settled in Tunis, the very secular representatives of the Third Republic did not think to restore the Tunisian constitution which had been largely inspired by the French Enlightenment. England had intervened in Egypt at the request of the conservative Khedive, Tawfiq, and with the blessing of the *caliph* from Istanbul, to control and dominate the native Egyptians who simply claimed the right to be treated equally with the Turks in their own country. This situation inevitably led to a change of perspective. The group of scholars grouped around al-Afghani in Cairo having earlier strongly supported the reforms of Khayr al-Din in Tunis, found themselves allied to create in Paris the association and the anti-colonialist newspaper *al-Urwa al-wuthqa* (the indissoluble bond) around 1883. The independence of the Muslim countries then took over all other concerns.

3.7 Paris, Capital of Modern Islam!

It was first the French revolution that surprised and challenged Muslims, triggering their reflection on the modernization of Islam. The Ottoman Sultan Selim had understood the exceptional character of this event in European history. He sent ambassadors to Paris to inform him about the real state of France. The assessments given by these ambassadors were very different, but it is this divergence of points of view on revolutionary France that opened the debate on the best way of proceeding to reform the Muslim world. The conquest of Egypt in 1798 was bitterly appreciated in Istanbul. Egypt was part of the territories of the Sultan; it was even in the heart of

its Empire. The prestige of the Sultan has been seriously altered. The latter turned to the English to protect his territories, thanks to them, Bonaparte's army was forced to evacuate Egypt in 1801. Selim had asked all the Muslim governors to break their relations with France and to declare war of them. Some, like Hamuda Pasha in Tunis, complied with this demand. In fact, France had never ceased to fascinate the Ottomans and Muslim elites in general by its Enlightenment and by the radical change that the revolution had introduced into the course of history. The French Enlightenment undoubtedly penetrated the Muslim world slowly, but also deeply.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that, although the original Islam was born in Mecca and classical Islam developed in Baghdad, modern Islam signed its baptismal certificate in Paris. The Egyptian chronicler Jabarti (1826) witnessed the French expedition. He certainly deplored the presence of foreign troops in his country and expressed his hostility to the degraded manners of these modern men, but he did not hide his admiration for the science and discipline that characterized the French. This fascination was such that Jabarti reports that the daughter of one of the highest religious dignitaries of Egypt, the Shaykh al-Bikri, even exchanged her Muslim clothes to dress in the French fashion and frequent the French of the expedition. The unfortunate woman was executed after the departure of the French army. Another high-ranking cleric, Shaykh Hasan al-Attar, later advised his student al-Tahtawi to accompany a scientific expedition to Paris to bring to Muslims what was the reality of this fascinating civilization. We have already spoken of the importance exercised by al-Tahtawi in the diffusion of the Enlightenment: he gave, in his Takhlis al-Ombiz, a sympathetic description of his stay in France and was the first to translate its constitution and to detail its educational and cultural system. Upon his return to Egypt, he directed the translation program ordered by Muhammad 'Ali and translated several works including the Persian Letters of Montesquieu.

The intellectuals of the time were not the only ones to be fascinated by the French model since the politicians of the East have not stopped dreaming of playing the Muslim Bonaparte. This was the case of Muhammad Ali in Egypt, who asked for the translation of Bonaparte's memoirs and the history of France, as well as Ahmad Bey, who rushed during his visit to France in 1846 to gather on the tomb of Bonaparte. Urabi Pasha, who later led a revolt against the ruling oligarchy in Egypt, confessed in his memoirs that he had been an admirer of Bonaparte. The Bonaparte of the reforming governors was the military conqueror, the Bonaparte of their intellectual advisers was the man who had abolished privileges to constitute a modern nation, the legislative and modernizing Bonaparte. But when the idea of reform passed from the sphere of the state to what was called the international reformist, Bonaparte's judgement changed radically since centralized autocratism was denounced. The ideal of the political and military hero was now replaced with an active elite in civil society.

Indeed, around 1877, a relative of al-Afghani, an Arab Christian immigrant in Egypt called Hunayn Nimatallah Khur published the Arabic translation of Guizot's book *Histoire de la civilization en Europe*. In the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram* (No. 41, 1877), a surprisingly vibrant eulogy of this book was written by al-Afghani and Abduh. According to them, this book contained a program that could be

perfectly transposed for the reform and modernization of the Muslim world. François Guizot (1787–1874) dominated the history of nineteenth-century France with Thiers. As a Protestant, he was history professor, a talented writer and a politician. Louis-Philippe appointed him Minister of the Interior in 1830, then of Public Education. In particular, he was responsible for the centralization of the primary education system (Guizot law of 1833). In 1847 he became President of the Council. In France, he was considered to be conservative because of his obstinacy in refusing the reform of the electoral system and his support for Louis-Philippe's monarchy; they were both overthrown by the revolution of 1848. For the pan-Islamic elite, he represented the intellectual who had wanted to correct the excesses of the revolutionary epoch and to make a median way between anarchy and conservatism.

What did Guizot's book contain for it to be taught and commented on by al-Afghani like the treatises on Theology and grammar were taught at the time? It was, in fact, a set of history classes given by a man who embodied post-revolutionary liberalism. Although his family was killed by the Revolution, Guizot adhered to the values of the New Regime while denouncing its excesses. The Church was not, in his eyes, the monster portrayed by the so-called period of the Terror, but secularization was the modern solution for the relationship between the state and religion. For Guizot, the two greatest events of modernity were the Lutheran reform and the irruption of the French Revolution, the first anticipating the second. It is very likely that al-Afghani and his companions dreamed of guiding Muslim societies in the direction of two similar reforms, religious and political. For them, it was a matter of reform and not of revolution, according to the lesson given by Guizot, the anti-revolutionary liberal. They took the history of Europe as it had been traced by Guizot as a possible program applicable to the future of Muslim societies. The fact that al-Afghani surrounded himself with Muslims and Christians to comment on Guizot's book is a sign that their two communities lived at the time the same dream, that of emancipating themselves from an old regime imposed by the alliance of the autocratic holders of power and the conservative leaders of the religious communities. Rather than putting themselves at the service of an Eastern Bonaparte who would soon be born, their choice was to constitute a pan-Islamic association that would take charge of the affairs and future of a traumatized Muslim world.

Paris, which later welcomed the association and the newspaper *al-Urwa al-wuthqa*, represented a second stage of the reform movement from below. Paris later attracted the interest of the reformist elite by the famous law of 1905 on secularism. It is also the debate caused by this law that imploded this elite, as the next chapter will explain. Thus, although Salafi Islam developed in the peripheries of the Muslim world, reformist Islam was born in its great metropolises, as a result of journeys and exchanges between the East and the West. It grew up in connection with modern Western thought, especially French thought. It tried all at once to dialogue with Western thought, to borrow part of its vocabulary and ideas, to refute some of its theses, and to at times compete with it on the terrain of the universality of values. Al-Afghani and Abduh were the successors of Khayr al-Din and al-Tahtawi and were in no way influenced by Wahhabism. The radicalization of some of their positions can be explained by the radicalization of the political situation in the Middle

East, particularly after the French intervention in Tunis in 1881 and the British intervention in Egypt in 1882. Between Salafism, which rejects the modern world, and reformism which tries to accommodate it while refusing some of its aspects, there is an abyss. The search for a religion of universal dimension cannot be confused with that of a worship of ancestors, nor the rejection of colonial projects with the rejection of modernity.

References

Ali, Merad. 1992. *Contemporary Islam*, 4th ed., corrected, 26. P.U.F.
Austin, J.L. 1970. *How to Do Things with Word*s?, 1962. Seuil.
Bernard, Lewis. 1988. *The Political Language of Islam*, translated from English by Odette Guitard, Gallimard, 173–174.
Louis, Cheiko. 1986. *Tarikh al-tiba'a fi l-Mashriq*. Beirut.

Part II
Perspectives for Today's Islam

Chapter 4
What Is Left of Classical Reformism?

Abstract The alliance between Muslim and Christian scholars around the idea of a religious, political, and social reform in the Orient was sealed in 1871 around the figure of al-Afghani. In 1903, however, the alliance was subjected to a severe test. The previous chapter saw Abduh struggling with conservatives for reform of the al-Azhar University mosque. Another event took place in concomitance with this which deserves discussion because it bears witness to the limits of reformist thinking.

Keywords Secularism · Tolerance · National liberation · Muslim brothers · Wahhabism · Postcolonial states · Tahar Haddad

4.1 Radicalization: The Problem with Secularism

The alliance between Muslim and Christian scholars around the idea of a religious, political, and social reform in the Orient was sealed in 1871 around the figure of al-Afghani. In 1903, however, the alliance was subjected to a severe test. The previous chapter saw Abduh struggling with conservatives for reform of the al-Azhar University mosque. Another event took place in concomitance with this which deserves discussion because it bears witness to the limits of reformist thinking.

Let it be clear: we do not wish for religious thought to subvert a "religious" vision of the world, because it would compromise its fidelity to the past and risk to alter its specificity. To have a certain nostalgic attitude is one thing, to radically oppose modernity in the name of religion and tradition is another. As stated in the preface, the purpose of religious reform is to stop the evolution of society from being hindered in the name of religion. Religious thought can accommodate, more or less, the great modern changes while keeping a symbolic system which is its own.

M. Haddad, *Muslim Reformism - A Critical History*, Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations 11, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36774-9_4

It will then accept new ideas by formulating them according to a vocabulary that is familiar to it and by seeking to legitimize and reverse its own borrowing. The acrobatics of memory often make borrowing slow and its meaning quite ambiguous. However, the perplexities of this semi-conservative attitude are offset by the strength and weight with which it will be invested when speaking in the name of a collective memory.

It is in the light of these considerations that we must analyze one of the most important controversies of modern Arab thought in 1903 between Abduh and the Syrian-Lebanese writer emigrated to Egypt, Farah Antun. This controversy then echoed French debates that preceded the promulgation of the 1905 law on secularism. Indeed, French debates did not leave indifferent the contemporary Arab scholars, including the *mufti* of Egypt!

Farah Antun had taken defense of French law. He openly invited to promulgate a similar law in the Muslim world for two reasons. Firstly, he saw in secularism the solution that would allow the Middle East to guard itself against the greed of the European powers and prevent it from being divided into a multitude of ethnic and community states, more or less weak and shared between colonial administrations. He then felt that secularism would allow a freedom of thought and expression that would not fail to favor the scientific and intellectual development of the Arabs. Coming from a predominantly Muslim region, Antun, an Eastern Christian, sought to promote among Muslims the role of non-Islamic communities, who were more aware of the progress of the modern world and wanted to see a radical equality between all citizens, regardless of their community affiliation. Antun believed that the weakness of Arab societies stemmed mainly from their organization on a community basis; he therefore believed in a "citizenship" that would flourish in the context of a secular state which would refrain from any interference in the field of beliefs.

The fact that *mufti* Muhammad Abduh agreed to discuss it with a Christian scholar who, additionally, did not belong to the Egyptian socio-cultural elite is a fact that should be highlighted. Usually, a *mufti* makes judgments and not opinions, and may condemn an idea or its author. Abduh agreed to discuss secularism in terms of exchange of views and refrained from any haughty criticism of Antun. Antun, moreover, was friends with Abduh and was part of this Islamic-Christian group whose members invited to the reform.

It is clear from the responses given by Abduh to Antun's writings that the idea of secularism remained obscure to him. In 1903, such an idea scarcely touched Arab thought. In fact, secularism was difficult to apprehend by the majority of scholars, given the absence of any democratic experience in Arab societies. Abduh's arguments turn out to be intellectually weak when compared to those of Antun; however, they enjoyed an enthusiastic welcome from an audience whose thinking was intellectually limited by historical situations accessible to them. The relationship between the magnitude of the reception and the strength of argumentation in this controversy of the early twentieth century is inverse.

Nevertheless, accepting controversy implied the ability to borrow some aspects of secularism by reformulating them according to a vocabulary less burdened by its

origins and by resorting to a process of retrospective legitimization. It would take too long to expose the arguments exchanged between the authors of the controversy. It suffices to expose Abduh's position. This can be summed up as follows: secularism is a stage of European progress, because it allowed temporal authority to emancipate itself from the Church, which exercised a hegemonic power over societies. Secularism has, moreover, had its share in the scientific and intellectual development of Europe. The Muslim world certainly needs a similar development, but it can be more economical with secularism, because Islam is neither a theocracy nor a Church that controls the spirits. "The *caliph* is a civil governor in all respects," he writes. The *qadi* or *mufti* are, likewise, civil servants. In other words, since there is no separation in Islam between men of religion and other believers: everything in Muslim society is secular. What Islam needs is a return to its original spirit, which is a spirit of tolerance. It is tolerance, not secularism, that will foster a new development of science and literature in Muslim societies, like periods of greatness such as the reign of the *caliph Abbasid al-Ma'mun* (813–833). Did he not establish in Baghdad the famous "House of Wisdom" (*Bayt al-Hikma*) to translate the philosophy and the sciences of the Greeks by involving the Christians and Jews of his empire?

Tolerance rather than secularism was the essence of Abduh's proposal. As Antun noted, Abduh did not realize that tolerance, in turn, was a new concept that had emerged with modernity. The modern philosophy of tolerance goes further than the coexistence of the monotheistic religions that Islam accepted and organized since its advent. Secularism, or at least the secularization of political space, assumed a further step that Abduh's thought did not have the audacity to accomplish. But the mere fact Abduh said the caliph is a civilian governor in all respects was itself a revolution inside Islam. Is it necessary to recall that, in 1903, the Muslim caliphate was not yet abolished and that the reigning caliph was none other than the autocrat Abdul Hamid II? The latter still defended an imperialist pan-Islamism which Abduh intended to distinguish himself from by such a declaration. The idea of a civil government was taken up and radicalized later by Ali Abd al-Raziq in order to defend the thesis of compatibility between Islam and secularism.

To better situate Abduh's thought in its historical and social context, it should not be compared to the ideas of intellectuals who were emancipated vis-à-vis any specific belief, but to confront the positions of men of religion that were his contemporaries. The number of the Muslim "doctors" who accepted the principle of the civil character of government and of "Muslim" institutions has always been few in number. Secularity was, and remained, a thesis as incomprehensible as it was reprehensible. In the West, the Catholic Church still lived during the time of the condemnation of human rights by Pius IX and his 1864 Syllabus which was anathema to the freedom of religious expression. The French clergy had fiercely opposed the 1905 law and Pope Pius X had condemned it. Admittedly, the Catholic position has progressed since then and has become more and more progressive, especially after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). The Muslim position, on the contrary, seems to have regressed. In 1903, Abduh's position was thus more open than that of the Roman Pope, but the position of the highest dignitaries of today's Muslim religion is similar as that of the 1864 Syllabus. Islam still awaits its reform and should real-

ize it according to its own logic, as it will be sketched in broad strokes in the epilogue of this book. The rich teachings of this controversy, as of many others, have been relegated to second place in the struggles for national liberation.

4.2 Religion and National Liberation

Indeed, the interwar period saw the birth of decolonization movements. Freedom and independence had become the leitmotifs of the peoples of the Global South, including Muslims. The image of the reformer was then erased to make way for that of the charismatic leader leading his people to independence. The demand for independence called for, first and foremost, national unity; it was necessary, therefore, to silence differences and set aside the critical spirit and revisionism of the past. The notion of *umma* thus took on a strongly politicized connotation, for it was in the name of memory that a national state was claimed. The *umma*, imagined by the legitimate aspiration to independence, was to become an indisputable reality after independence.[1] The great paradox is that the independence movements that succeeded in building independent states were not religious movements; on the contrary, they have all been patriotic or national movements, often led by the heads of modern schools of thought. Religion had, however, been used to mobilize minds in the political struggle and often served as a cement for the claimed national unity. Colonialist ideology denied the "natives" their identity and their history; the notion of Muslim *umma* was then brandished as an answer to this denigration of memory. Another generation of reformists tried to reconcile national struggle and self-criticism, but they were overtaken by events. The most representative personalities of this generation are from the Maghreb: the Moroccan Allal al-Fasi (1910–1974), the Algerian Abd al-Hamid Ibn Badis (1889–1940) and the Tunisian Abd al-'Aziz al -Tha'alibi (1874–1944).

Let's take the last one as an example. In 1904, al -Tha'alibi was imprisoned for writing a book titled *The Liberal Spirit of the Qur'an*. This was a small essay as surprising in tone as it was in content. He set himself the goal of showing that only a liberal interpretation of the Qur'an could help Muslims return to past glory. The liberal interpretation rests solely on two sources, the Qur'an and the so-called testimonies of the Prophet. In other words, tradition in its broad sense should no longer be the source for Muslims. According to the author, the erroneous interpretations of the Qur'an were spread for centuries by the maraboutic brotherhoods. It is the latter who are held responsible for breaking the momentum of Muslim civilization.

[1] We fully subscribe to this relevant thought by Hélè Béji: "Between those who, by attachment to the cultural representation of the origin, do not manage to rethink for themselves the freedom, and those who, in the name of the freedom, have Left to develop gigantic tools of control of the culture, the same part of human was sacrificed […]. Decolonization has no more succeeded in rebuilding mankind than colonialism had succeeded in destroying it." in *The Cultural Imposture*, Stock, 1997, p. 86–87.

Modernization in the Muslim world therefore requires a return to rationality. This is the very essence of reformist reasoning: the path of progress is first conceived as an exercise in memory. Some of the book's proposals were daring. He defends the idea that Islam fully recognizes the other monotheistic religions and called for peaceful cohabitation with their followers. Paradise is the reward of all virtuous people, even non-Muslims. Freedom of worship must be guaranteed to non-Muslims living in a predominantly Muslim society. The Muslim woman must not be an eternal recluse, ostracized from society, serving only as an instrument of pleasure for her husband.

One of the topics in the book was the Islamic veil. "Women must have their faces uncovered, must not be locked up in their homes, must not be kept out of sight, must be educated and have a decent and honest attitude," he writes.[2] The argument put forward to support this statement was based on the principle of a return to the sources and at times strayed into rather curious arguments. The Persians are accused of having distorted original Arabic Islam. The veil, like magic, astrology, and alchemy, are part of their "evil influence." Until the end of the second century of the Hegira, he writes, Muslim women circulated everywhere with their uncovered faces. They were then veiled under the influence of the Persians who had embraced the Muslim religion. Jurists subsequently justified this with an incorrect interpretation of the Qur'an. Correcting this deviation is therefore essential in present times, in order to enable Muslim women to participate in the progress of their society: "The suppression of this veil is the emancipation of women, it is the war against fanaticism and ignorance, it is the diffusion of the ideas of progress and civilization, it is the safeguarding of the higher interests of the family and the family patrimony, it is finally the reconstitution of the Muslim society as it was with the time of the Prophet and his companions, that is to say as European society."[3]

A few years later, he embarked on the national struggle and founded the *Dustur* Party (Constitution) to make the voice of Tunisians heard and help secure their right to self-determination. He was again imprisoned, this time by a French judicial inquiry. He had participated in the drafting of an anti-colonial pamphlet, *Martyred Tunisia*, published in French in 1920. His purpose was to show the misdeeds of colonization and specify the demands of the Tunisian people. What is noteworthy in this pamphlet is that the misdeeds of the time are exaggerated: the author attributed to the colonial era all of the problems and misfortunes that in fact existed earlier in Muslim societies. It is tempting to say that in this book the "settler" took the place of the "Persian" in the earlier book. It was always necessary to find a scapegoat responsible for an unfortunate story that betrayed the Message: a degraded present that is the dishonor of an illustrious past. This is always the price of reformism: if access to progress involves an exercise in memory that revives the greatness of the past, all manipulations of this memory become legitimate from the moment they serve the absolute purpose of reform.

[2] *The liberal spirit of the Qur'an*, reproduction, Tunis, MED, 1999, p. 19.

[3] Ibid. p. 13.

In Tunisia, al-Tha'alibi and the Destour party (*Dustur*) that he founded were ousted by Bourguiba and his Neo-Destour. In Morocco, Allal al-Fasi and his party of *Istiqlal* could not compete for a long time with the movements of the left. In Algeria, Abd al-Hamid Ibn Badis became only a vague memory after the constitution of the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*). Another era was beginning and reformism was disappearing everywhere in the Muslim world as a result of the radicalization of national movements and the emergence of charismatic leaders, Westernized militants and ideological intellectuals, all of them from modern schools.

4.3 Religion and Postcolonial States

Leaders of postcolonial states have inherited the situation described above. They had to succeed in two contradictory tasks: to remain faithful to the spirit of the liberation period, during which Islam was strongly solicited, and to go ahead by changing social and cultural situations which derived their legitimacy from the representations dominant within Islam. They needed at the same time to entrust the colonial era with all evils and to open their societies to a modernization borrowed from the "colonialist" West. The genius of each leader was measured by his ability to find the right dosages and to blur the tracks. It is here that one can find, broadly speaking, two models of modernization based on the ideology of progress: Bourguiba's liberal model and Nasser's socialist model.

Shortly after having gained power, following the Tunisian declaration of independence in March 1956, Bourguiba began a series of bold reforms which were unparalleled in the Arab world. The most famous was the promulgation of a Personal Status Code on August 13th, 1956. Under this Code, polygamy was prohibited and any polygamist became liable to penal sanctions. Divorce was no longer the prerogative of the man, because the woman could also ask for it and obtain it. In both cases, only the civil court was empowered to pronounce divorce by ensuring that the divorced wife enjoyed a series of rights that guaranteed her a decent life for herself and her children. The marriage was subject to the agreement of the two contractors and not only to their families. A legal age was set for those who wanted to enter into marriage. The Code included several other provisions that went in the same direction. The drafters took care to juggle classical Islamic law, especially with the verses of the Qur'an, so as not to oppose head-on men of religion. They had to give up some measures that would have offended them too greatly. Nevertheless, the Code still caused an uproar when it was officially announced. The men of religion unanimously disapproved of it, even if they did not all openly express themselves on the subject. Indeed, some felt that it was safer not to openly challenge the charismatic leader of the new Tunisia.

But Bourguiba did not intend to stop there. Men of religion held two main institutions under their control, namely justice and education. Under the pretext of nationalizing justice and eliminating the courts of the colonial era, Bourguiba got

rid of "religious courts" and implemented civil justice. In 1958, he ended the teaching autonomy of the al-Zaytuna Mosque-University, depriving the "religious" representatives of the second source of their authority (and their revenues). Bourguiba refused to include in the new constitution the term "Muslim state" to describe independent Tunisia and opted for a vague formula that stipulated that Islam was the religion of the country. Traditionally, men of religion profited largely from religious foundations (*ahbas*): Bourguiba put them under the control of the state and absorbed them into his administration. The seizure of these properties also implied the end of "maraboutism" that Bourguiba had also fiercely opposed. Tunisia even preceded France by authorizing abortion, because Bourguiba had adopted an active program of birth control which opposed the traditional religious position. This was indeed a policy of transformation, and of cultural desiccation, which in a few years made it possible for a centuries-old religious institution to become a mere administrative department at the service of the State.

Bourguiba did not intend to "de-Islamize" the country, but he wanted religion to be under the strict control of the state. A *mufti* post was created for this purpose and the services of the Muslim religion were taken over by the State. The first *mufti* named by Bourguiba had to resign when Bourguiba dared to initiate an unprecedented "provocation." He wanted to convince them that Tunisia is fighting for its development and prosperity and that Islam allows not to fast in case of war, so for Bourguiba, the great jihad is the struggle for development; the full participation Tunisians at this battle would thus allow them to benefit from this exemption from fasting.

Some thought it was too excessive, especially since Bourguiba also wanted to introduce full equality between men and women in matters inheritance. *Fatwas* declaring him a renegade and political denunciations treating him as a layman inferior to the West multiplied everywhere. A popular riot erupted at the instigation of an *imam* from a mosque in Kairouan. So Bourguiba was forced to calm his ardor; he had to content himself with speeches denouncing conservatism and calling for a religious practice compatible with the spirit of the times. In doing so, he was betting on future generations. But that was countered with the rise of Islamism as of the 1970s. Islamism is not part of the continuity of the religious institution, which was weakened by Bourguiba, but it expresses the understandable reaction of those disappointed by management style of the "Father of independence." Indeed, the leaders of Islamism are graduates of modern education, as developed in the Bourguiba Era. The postcolonial state had, in fact, found itself facing a double crisis: an economic crisis, a consequence of the failure of the so-called "cooperative" economic policy, and political crisis, a consequence of the authoritarianism of the founding father of modern Tunisia. While Bourguiba's charisma had allowed him to bend religious institutions to his ideas, in a few years, Islamism would resist him and even grow – to his great regret.

Nasser, in Egypt, had nothing in common with Bourguiba, except that he was a fervent supporter of an ideology of progress which saw religion as an obstacle in which the nuisance had to be alleviated to enable society to move forward. One of Nasser's major decisions was to nationalize al-Azhar's religious institution and turn

it into a state administration. While Bourguiba confronted religious institutions and Islamism separately, Nasser was confronted with both at the same time. So, he tried to play both against each other. At the same time, he called on intellectuals to develop a progressive religious thought that would go in the direction of his revolution. We must therefore speak of Hasan Hanafi, whom some consider to be the organic intellectual of modern Islam, because he was the most radical and the most prolific of all in the elaboration of what he saw to be the Islamic Theology of liberation. Perhaps it should be opposed to Hisham Ja'it (Hichem Djaït) who, in his own way, was the first in Tunisia to try to think of a secularism open to religious themes, in conformity with what the new Tunisian elite was hoping. It is clear, however, that critical intellectuals, whether "Islamizing" or modernist, have had little influence on public opinion, as it is true that the authoritarianism of leaders and the conformity of societies did not leave much room for them to maneuver.

The idea of a theology of liberation and a "progressive" Islam has thus made its way to Egypt and then to the Arab world. However, once again, the crisis of the postcolonial state led to the failure of this new religious discourse. The crisis of Nasserism turns out to have been more complex. Nasser had to face the European powers in deciding to nationalize the Suez Canal in 1956. He had to ally with the former communist bloc to maintain his army and its industry. He opted for a tough policy against his political opponents. He was the constant target of intrigues by the oil monarchies who did not forgive him for leading the first revolution in the Arab world. But two important events brought him a fatal blow: his conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood and the 1967 war against Israel.

Nasser's rule was dominated by a long and hard conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brothers had certainly supported his revolution, but they wanted neither socialism nor agrarian reform. They called for an Islamic organization of society, while Nasser proposed a rather secular "philosophy of revolution." In protest, the Brothers distanced themselves from the new state power. Those who wanted to maintain the dialogue with Nasser and his companions were excluded from the organization. Student demonstrations were organized by the Brothers, chanting slogans openly hostile to Nasser. Nasser decided to dissolve the organization in early 1954. A few months later, an attack was perpetrated against him in Alexandria, which he hastened to blame on the organization. A bloody persecution ensued, which ended only with the defeat of Nasser in the 1967 war. Several Muslim Brotherhood leaders were executed, including Abd al-Qadir Awda in 1954, and Sayyid Qutb in 1966.

Moreover, the "progressive" Islam that Nasser had encouraged against the Gulf monarchies and the preachers of the Muslim Brotherhood was completely eliminated after the 1967 war. The defeat of Nasser was, in fact, perceived by many Egyptians as divine punishment that struck a head of state who had spread "atheist" socialism and exposed Muslim Egypt to the Communists. Hard and violent Islamism then took over from the rather conciliatory Islamism of Hassan al-Banna. Paradoxically, most of the former representatives of the so-called Nasserist "progressive" Islam turned away after 1967. The case of Muhammad Umara, the com-

piler of Abduh's works, has already been mentioned. He had been among the most famous representatives of this so-called "progressive" Islam. Another curious case is that of Khalid Muhammad Khalid. The latter was one of the religious teaching scholars who made headlines in the 1950s and 1960s with audacious books, some of which were blacklisted by al-Azhar itself. In these books he offered a political interpretation of Islam in radical opposition to orthodoxy. Not only was he a supporter of Ali Abd al-Raziq's thesis on the secular character of the government in Islam, but he also defended a thesis that argued that democracy is the only political regime compatible with Islam. He made the *ulema*, of which he was a member, responsible for the decadence of the Muslim world. While the Shaykhs of al-Azhar hinted that socialism, including the expropriation of land, undermined the principles of Islam, he fervently argued that collectivist socialism was the very essence of the Muslim religion. But this author changed his position radically after Nasser's death and converted to the apologetic literature of orthodox Islam. What's more, his works from the "revolutionary" period have practically disappeared from bookstores.

The postcolonial period was thus marked in the world of intellectuals by the gradual disappearance of liberalism, which was accused of having more or less favored colonialism. The era of "hard ideologies" corresponds to the entire second half of the twentieth century. The exceptions were rare: the Djaït, Arkoun, Laroui, and Jabri were able to enjoy a certain celebrity, but they could hardly compete with other ideologies. The conflict was with the ideologized Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood, Arab Stalinism, and pan-Arab nationalism. In fact, the radicalism of these ideologies did not correspond to the real state of their societies. Was it, in fact, radicalism or an attitude that avoided reality by projecting itself into a certain utopia and dreamy speeches? There was fighting to represent and defend the proletarians of societies that were not even industrialized, and nationalism and pan-Arabism were preached in countries where social life was often based on tribalism and communitarianism. It is therefore not surprising that Islamism eventually prevailed, because among the Utopias in competition, it managed to reach better than others the most diverse layers of Arab societies abandoned to their sad fate.

4.4 The Hidden Caliphate: The International Islamist

The void in religion was the result of the hegemony of ideological progress in Western intellectual production and that of the westernized political-intellectual elite who held power in a newly decolonized Third World. It was thought to have solved the religious problem everywhere by confining religion to churches and mosques. Leftist movements in the Arab world have participated fully in maintaining this illusion. While Arab societies still participated in very core of manifestations of belief, their elites spent most of their time discussing the exegetical subtleties of a Marxist-Leninist corpus, and were divided between various projects of Stalinist totalitarianism. Unlike Western European intellectuals, Third World intellectuals

rarely admitted self-criticism. Yet Islamism was not the only manifestation of the age of hard ideology. All in all, the notion of the proletariat imported by the Marxist left and that of the Arab nation imported by secular nationalism has equally contributed to the alienation of Arab thought.

This void has been maliciously exploited by Islamism, which preferred, at first, to abandon the sphere of the state to this so-called elite to conquer society from below while taking advantage of the movement of "de-ruralization" caused by the universalization of education and the rise of urbanization after decolonization. It is significant, in this respect, that the democratization of education coincided with the rise of Islamism; indeed, for entire generations, access to books meant access to religious books. Some intellectuals continue today to denounce Arabization and to make it bear the responsibility for a situation that is, in reality, infinitely more complex. Admittedly, Arabization has often depended on a precipitous political decision that has aggravated an already fragile situation. But Arabization was still the inevitable consequence of decolonization. Should the majority of the population have been allowed to sink into misery and ignorance so that the learned intellectuals can continue to discuss, in all serenity, the nature of Soviet socialism in the Soviet Union or the cultural revolution in China? In reality, the attachment to the values of Progress and Enlightenment should be translated into an effort to expose the conquests of the human spirit in a language accessible to the entire population. To spread their enlightened thoughts on a large scale, had Luther, Calvin and Dante not abandoned Latin and written in vernacular languages? If Voltaire had begun to write in English, would he have had the same influence in his country and in the world? In fact, the hasty Arabization of education and the dogmatic rejection of Arabization are two faces of the same coin, that of the intellectual laziness of the Arab elites. They preferred to feel modern by morally denigrating their own culture. Above all, they did not see the danger coming.

The danger was closer, but hidden, and finally burst into the crisis of the post-colonial state. We must go back even further to understand how Islamism has been able to invade society from below. We already talked about the first generation of reformist-counselors who were proponents of state reforms of the nineteenth century and the second generation who succeeded and did not come from Ottoman Empire but rather what could be cautiously called "Pan-Islamic civil society." These two generations of reformers ended in failure. Political decolonization and the advent of post-colonial states gave the impression that religion was no longer a major problem and was no longer useful. But not all social forces heard the same thing.

According to a statement attributed to the Prophet of Islam, he who dies without allegiance to a *caliph* dies in ungodliness. From this prophetic saying, one can understand the dismay of the pious Muslim when, in 1924, they accepted the abolition of the caliphate and the dismissal of the last *caliph* by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The ensuing debates failed to agree on the new state that should carry the banner of the Islamic caliphate. It was in this context that the idea of an "International Islamism" that would take over from the fallen caliphate began to take shape.

Islamism is not the representative of the Muslim tradition, despite its claims. It is rather a project of re-Islamization of societies that have been cut off from this tradition. What Islamism proposes as a tradition is, in fact, only the altered and distorted memory of this tradition which, additionally, has been largely politicized to serve as a logical extension to the conquest of power. When the caliphate was abolished in Turkey, three competitors sought to take over: the Hashemites in the Levant, the Khedives in Egypt, and the al-Sauds in Hijaz. The former no longer had their assets and did not control the holy sites of Islam conquered by the Wahhabis, the Khedives were too Westernized in their politics and morals to act as spiritual guides of Islam, and the al-Sauds had not yet proved themselves, especially since their religious thought, Wahhabism, was not in conformity with the Asharite doctrine to which the majority of Muslims subscribed. Finally, none of the three competitors won the game. To preserve their state, the al-Sauds had to face the excess of zeal of their Wahhabi allies, "the Brothers." When the oil bonanza ensured the kingdom its opulence, the religious institution became a partner in the profit, stopping its moral control on the manners of the emirs and its interference in their political decisions. In return, he was entrusted with the management of Islam in the kingdom and elsewhere. Hundreds of millions of petrodollars have been invested as part of this sharing of roles and profits to serve the Islamic preaching (*da'wa*), which is the re-Islamization of Muslim societies and the spread of Islam in the world. This situation lasted more than half a century: the ruling family got rid of all religious protest in their kingdom by corrupting its protagonists so that the emirs could afford all the differences vis-à-vis of Muslim morality without being disturbed, while the West saw Islamism as a bulwark for the penetration of Communism into an oil-rich Middle East.

Islamic Reformism, in its phase of breathlessness, was then tempted to see hope in Wahhabism. A man like Rashid Rida sincerely thought that the young Saudi kingdom could give the anticipated new momentum for the rebirth of the East, and he imagined this momentum in the form of a pan-Islamic movement led by Arabs, and possibly by a new caliphate assumed this time by the Arab nation, as was once the case with the Umayyads and the first Abbasids. The Muslim world, an orphan of its caliphate, was looking for a solution and a substitute; the Arab world, wishing to emancipate itself from all foreign tutelage, considered the possibility of unity and dreamed of an ideology that could assure it. This explains why men as different in their formation as the "Puritan" Muslim Rashid Rida and the oriental, then agnostic Christian Amin al-Rayhani have jointly put themselves at the service of Ibn Saud. It has been pointed out earlier what the consequences were for reformism, Wahhabism, and the very distortion of the reformist memory. But, for many figures of the time, the essential project was the constitution of an Arab state free from Turkish oversight that had lasted several centuries and guarded against the risks of a new foreign tutelage, this time Western.

Another fatal collaboration took place later between Wahhabism and the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, this was very natural because the ideology of the latter, even the very name they gave themselves, was not far from that of Wahhabism. Certainly,

Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Brotherhood, did not have traits of a desert man: he lived in Egypt, in a country that was liberal in its political life and culture. The Muslim Brotherhood thus constituted the urban version of Islamic fundamentalism, while Wahhabism was its tribal version. The common denominator was the project of a re-Islamization of Muslim societies. Indeed, all fundamentalisms have the ideal of consciously renewing the adherents of a religion to the authentic practice after having purified it of its habits and customs (i.e. the Anabaptist movements in Christianity). However, the specificity of the Islamic case is the importance attributed to the state as the main vector of orientation of society. However, the Wahhabi Brothers and the Muslim Brotherhood had no claim at the outset to overthrow the states in which they lived: their aim was only to moralize them.

The situation changed when Egypt saw Nasser seize power by a *coup d'état*. First, this event paved the way everywhere to a series of coups, which ended up trivializing the use of military intervention against the governments in place. Then, Nasser decided to formally adopt socialism, which was, in the eyes of Islamists, associated with impious communism, the enemy of religion. Finally, from 1954 to 1971, Nasser had persecuted the Muslim Brotherhood, as mentioned above. The idea of re-Islamization was then radicalized by affirming, as its necessary precondition, the overthrow of the regimes in place. The members of the association of Brothers who had fled Egypt had taken refuge in the Gulf countries, largely influenced by Wahhabism. Cooperation between the two "Brothers," was profitable to the two camps, allowed the expelled Muslim Brothers to find a haven outside of Egypt and it allowed the Wahhabis to have preachers able to understand a rhetoric that was better received in the urban areas of Islam, including in Europe and the United States. The West, which had demonized Nasser, was happy to see this collaboration solidified against the leader of the rather secular pan-Arab state. Over the long run, this collaboration will have unexpected effects. In independent Algeria, for example, religious education was largely shaped by Muslim Brothers fleeing Egypt. Europe itself saw the Muslim Brotherhood as the most influential Islamic network among its new immigrants, Arabs and others.

At the same time, the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood underwent another influence, that of the Gama'a Islamiyya founded in India by Abul A'la Maududi (1903–1979). The Gama'a spoke on behalf of a part of the Muslim minority living in a Hindu majority India. Abu al-Hasan al-Nadawi translated the writings of Maududi into Arabic and wrote a book entitled *What the World lost as a result of the decadence of Muslims*. This book is the perfect illustration of an anti-Reformist thought, since the essential thesis is that the modern world must adapt to Islam and not that Muslims must align with the modern world. Maududi's fanatical writings no doubt reflected the fratricidal struggle between the Muslim and Hindu communities of India, but they took on a more violent dimension when they saw themselves transposed to Arab societies where Muslims were largely in the majority. The antagonism desired by Maududi between Muslims and non-Muslims in India was thus transposed in the Arab world into a conflict between Muslims, the *jihad* being metamorphosed into a *fitna*, to use the classical vocabulary of Islamic law. It is Sayyid Qutb, a literary critic converted to Islamism after a brief academic sojourn in the

United States, who was the mastermind of this transposition of the theses of the Gama'a Islamiyya onto Arab Islamism.

The basic principle of this Islamism is a political reading of the Qur'an. It should be noted, however, that this reading would not have been possible if the Qur'an had not been directly accessible to the majority of believers. This is the very consequence of literacy, on the one hand, and the printing and dissemination of the Qur'an, on the other. A popularized Qur'an, an unstable education system, and a saturated political life were the three components of an explosive cocktail. The Qur'an was transformed from a liturgical text into an identitarian and political program, especially since it had entered the printing press in a rather special context. Indeed, the Qur'an was printed in Cairo in 1924 under the aegis of the King of Egypt Fuad I (he reigned from 1922 to 1936), the same year of the abolition of the Islamic caliphate. This was not the first printed edition of the Qur'an, but it was the first edition recognized by an authoritative religious institution, the Al-Azhar Mosque-University. Why did Muslim scholars finally accept the spread of the Word of God through the printing press after banning it for centuries?[4]

It is too often forgotten that the main vector of dissemination of the Qur'an in the Muslim world was by oral tradition. The hand-made copy of the Qur'an was considered a work of piety. Few Muslims possessed a complete compendium of the "word of God" and widespread illiteracy left no doubt that Muslims knew the Qur'an through brotherhood rituals and collective recitations rather than through individual reading. What had happened in 1924 for the high religious authorities to indefinitely opt for a marriage with great enthusiasm between the Book of God and printing? In fact, the multi-century idea of an inherently unalterable text had always been associated with the old idea that the caliphate was the heritage of the State of Medina created by the Prophet Muhammad, a legacy as trans-historical as the Qur'an. But at that point in time the unbelievable had come and the caliphate had been abolished. The scholars were very divided as to the future of the Muslim *umma*: some wanted to transfer the caliphate to another Muslim territory while others resigned themselves to its outright disappearance. In this context, printing the Qur'an was an exceptional symbolism. Those who supported a transfer of the caliphate in Egypt could only appreciate the initiative of Khedive Fuad I. In doing so, he would have done the same as Abu Bakr, the first caliph of Islam, who, according to the Muslim tradition, had ordered the first collection of the Qur'an to better protect it in a rather murky political context. Fuad I was thus considered to be a worthy depository of the caliphate against his competitors. Those who resigned themselves to the loss of the

[4] The Qur'an had been printed in Europe since the sixteenth century. The Muslims had refused to allow the circulation of the European versions because they did not conform to the daily Qur'an recitations in their surroundings. In fact, they were not totally wrong. Technical imperfections due to the printing of non-Latin characters made European editions of texts very imprecise. In addition, several publishers allowed themselves to change verses inadvertently or deliberately. It was not until Flügel's edition in 1834 that strictly philological criteria prevailed over religious and ideological biases. It was forbidden for the Istanbul printing press, created in 1727, to print the Qur'an. The reason given was the fear of circulating imprecise versions of the Qur'an. European editions probably reinforced this fear.

caliphate appreciated this initiative for another reason: it made it possible to compensate the absence of the *caliph*, the faithful guardian and first hermeneutic of the Qur'an, by a generalized access and a personalized report to the Qur'an thus offered to all Muslims. By the same token, the Qur'an became the ultimate *caliph* of Islam. Henceforth, no one needed a guide other than the Qur'an itself: *Imam-na al-Qur'an* (Our Guide is the Qur'an) was a slogan taken up by the association of "Muslim Brotherhood." Without a *caliph*, every Muslim became individually responsible for the divine message. Only the printing press could accomplish the miracle of putting the Qur'an within the reach of every Muslim.

It was in this context that appeared, under the aegis of Fuad I in 1924, the printed version of the Qur'an. It continues to refer to today. The same year, the Wahhabis seized the holy places of Islam and a vast territory very rich in oil. Thanks to them, hundreds of millions of printed *mushafs* were distributed all over the world. And it was moreover in this innovative period that the Egyptian Hassan al-Banna (assassinated in 1949) created the association of the "Muslim Brotherhood" in 1928. The *Murshid al-Gama'a* (Spiritual Guide of the Community) became in a way the hidden *caliph* of Islam. Al-Banna chose for his association the following logo: in a circle, which represents the territory of Islam, a hand brandishes the Qur'an, and it is protected by two swords. Thus, every Muslim must now have his own Qur'an and defend it with weapons if necessary. An elitist Islam of the reformists was thus substituted by a mass Islam, carried by the preachers of the international Islamist.

4.5 State Reformism

There thus remained only one path for reformism, which put itself at the service of nation-states newly emancipated from Ottoman or European colonization. But it is certain that "state reformism" could not retain the ardor of its initiators, so it was difficult for it to compete with international Islamism.

Mahmud Shaltut (1893–1963) was the greatest religious authority in Egypt during the first half of Nasser's reign. He was appointed Grand Rector of the Al-Azhar Mosque-University because he was the disciple of Mahmud al-Maraghi and was dismissed from al-Azhar by supporting reforms that he wanted to introduce during his first mandate of rector in 1928–1929. We know that al-Maraghi, who we discussed in a previous chapter, was himself the disciple of Abduh. Shaltut allowed Nasser to pass the famous 1961 al-Azhar reform law, which was, in fact, a pretext for putting this multi-century religious institution under the control of the state. He developed the concept of "Muslim Civil Government" (*dawla madiniyya islamiyya*) to oppose the idea of pure secularity, on the one hand, and that of the theocratic state advocated by the Muslim brothers, on the other hand. He also developed the theme of "social justice" which was substituted in religious discourse for the notion of socialism.

It is clear, however, that Nasser and the so-called "Great Imam" were not really on the same wavelength. Shaltut's main work is *al-Islam: aqida wa Shariah* (Islam:

Dogma and Legislation).[5] The title is eloquent, since it means that Islam is not just a belief, but is also a law (Shariah) that needs to be applied. Shaltut thus took a moderate stance when compared to that of the Muslim Brotherhood, but it was in conflict with Nasser's revolutionary and socialist ideology. He thought that a head of state who did not apply Muslim law is a "disobedient" (*asi*) but not a renegade (*kafir*), which meant that there was no reason to oppose to this head of state by violence. This judgment applied implicitly to Nasser; therefore, he was more lenient than Sayyid Qutb's so-called theory of *hakimiyya*, according to which a head of state who does not apply Islamic law is a renegade and that armed revolt against him is a religious obligation.

While Nasser advocated for pan-Arabism, Shaltut called for pan-Islamism and vilified nationalism as a new form of *asabiyya* (tribal solidarity) that Islam had come to abolish. According to him, a Muslim nation is simply the country in which he decides to live, but his deep allegiance must go only to the Islamic *umma*. Islam does not allow the constitution of a state based on the principle of nationality, race, or citizenship. Brotherhood in the faith transcends all other bonds of sociability. While Nasser exercised an authoritarian power, Shaltut was fond of recalling that *shura* (consultation) is a condition of good Islamic governance. It seems that the relations between the two men deteriorated badly after Shaltut had understood the true intentions that Nasser hid behind his project of reform of al-Azhar: he then entrenched himself by way of protest.

In Tunisia, Bourguiba found, in turn, a great deal of difficulty in uniting a religious authority that agreed to openly and firmly support its decisions. He had eliminated the title of Shaykh al-Islam to replace it with the less prestigious one of *mufti*. In 1962, he revised the law establishing the title of *mufti* so that he would now give *fatwas* only at the express request of the government. Bourguiba then counted on two prestigious religious dignitaries, Muhammad Aziz Ja'it, who resigned in 1960 to protest Bourguiba's statements about fasting during the month of Ramadan, and Muhammad al-Tahir ibn Ashur, who had been a fervent supporter of Abduh and Rashid Rida. A descendant of a family of great religious dignitaries, al-Ṭahir ibn Ashur was the author of a prestigious commentary on the Qur'an entitled *Kitab al-tahrir wa-l-tanwir* (translation: *The book of the emancipation and enlightenment of the spirit*). Al-Tahir ibn Ashur wanted this emancipation to emanate from the Qur'an and not from the West. His thought saw to draw these lights into the revelation itself. He was an outstanding specialist in Arabic grammar and rhetoric, which allowed him to propose a new method of exegesis, called the "global method." Nevertheless, a detailed study of the positions expressed in this Qur'anic commentary on certain topics such as polygamy, gender equality, and civil divorce shows a clear dissonance with the provisions of the 1956 Personal Status Code which stated, however, that Bourguiba had adopted it with the approval of al-Tahir ibn Ashur.

In fact, Mahmud Shaltut and al-Tahir ibn Ashur represent a rather timid reformism, which, however, served to weakly support the reforms of the postcolonial states

[5] French translation, *Al-Bouraq*, Beirut, 1999.

without really supporting them and, above all, without seeking to give them a true religious legitimacy. These states rarely found an explicit religious base for their policy of reform. There were, however, some exceptions. In Tunisia, Muhammad al-Fadil ibn Ashur (son of al-Tahir), *mufti* of Bourguiba from 1962 to 1970, was an exceptional man for his largesse of spirit. Unfortunately, a life disturbed by the political context of his time and a relatively early death did not allow him to bequeath to posterity an abundant intellectual output. His public life and the few courses and treatises he left as a legacy still bear witness to an undeniable charisma and astonishing finesse.

4.6 The Case of al-Tahir al-Haddad (Tahar Haddad)

Tunisia gave birth to another, almost unclassifiable character who has carried the reformist paradigm to its extreme: Tahar Haddad (1899–1935). To understand the genius of this thinker, we first have to understood the concept of *maqasid*, or the "purposes of legislation." Abu Ishaq al-al-Shatibi, a Muslim jurist of the Medieval Age, had once proposed in a book entitled *al-Muwafaqat* a theory called "finalities." According to this theory, a jurist must not remain stuck in a literal interpretation of the Scriptures: he must take into consideration the purposes of the Shariah. In the event of opposition with the text (*nass*), the finality must prevail. This theory had remained marginal until modern times. Reformers then put it back into circulation. It is probably in Tunis that the work of al-Shatibi was printed for the first time. A copy was presented to Abduh during his visit to Tunis. Abduh remained impressed with this theory and spread it among his disciples. This theory, in fact, allowed one to circumvent the letter of the Qur'an while preserving its spirit.

Tahar Haddad went further, transforming this theory into a kind of evolutionary exegesis. The "finality," according to him, is evolutionary. Take the case of polygamy. For proponents of the "finalist" theory, it is possible to circumvent the Qur'an which allows limited polygamy by invoking the "finality" of enabling family life to flourish. If the holder of the power finds that polygamy becomes a source of family misfortune and that the letter opposes the "finality," it can prohibit polygamy by virtue of its civil liability towards Muslims. For Tahar Haddad, Islam does not allow polygamy, but it limits the number of co-wives allowed to prepare the complete ban on polygamy. Polygamy must not be abolished only by virtue of a civil decision, but it must be declared religiously forbidden for family happiness was the true "end" of the Qur'anic text, if one reads it according to the spirit and not to the letter.

The difference between the "finalities" theory in its classical reformist version and the evolutionist version proposed by Haddad may seem insignificant to a layperson; for theologians, on the other hand, it was sacrilege. Haddad provoked an uproar by defending the second version in a book published in 1930 titled *Imra'atu-na fi Shariah wa-l-mujtama'* (Our Woman Between Muslim Law and

Society). The ideas and arguments which he expressed here recall, in a nutshell, what had already been expressed by Qasim Amin 30 years earlier. But, unlike Amin, Haddad deliberately chose to challenge the men of religion on their own ground and to make them expressly responsible for the degraded situation of the Muslim woman. He dared to send a questionnaire to the six highest authorities of Islam in Tunis, who responded without suspecting his intentions. They were, consequently, scandalized to see him place their answers in his book, in a context which ridiculed them. Indeed, Haddad conceived of his work in three parts. In the first, he described the degrading sociological reality of women, giving full visibility to their misery by practicing a sentimental style borrowed from the romantics. In the second, he presented in their state the answers of the six religious dignitaries. He thereby intended to denounce the gap between the social reality and these dignitaries' speeches and make them bear the responsibility for the misery of the feminine condition, and more broadly of Muslim society.

Once these high characters were discredited, it became possible for professors of more modest rank, like Haddad himself, to speak on the subject. The third part then exposed the author's daring positions on such delicate issues as polygamy, divorce, marriage consent, women's education, etc. For Haddad, there are therefore two levels Qur'anic reading: its purpose and its letter. The purpose establishes equality between the two sexes. The letter falls short on this end, because it depends on the historical and sociological situation in which the Message was revealed. In other words, the letter of the Qur'an is contingent, the finality alone is part of its eternal message. Haddad thus undermined the authority of the *faqihs* whose vocation was precisely to practice the literal exegesis of the Scriptures. It is understandable then why these had risen, like a single man, to castigate the book and its author. Muhammad al-Tahir ibn Ashur, a moderate, presided over the commission of inquiry which then concluded that the book was not in conformity with the fundamental precepts of Islam. The same commission confirmed, however, the severe retort to the book written by Shaykh Muhammad al-Salih ibn Murad, who treated Haddad as a secularist paid for by evangelists whose aim is to undermine the authority of Islam and to push Muslim women to immorality and debauchery! Tahar Haddad was thus deprived of his diplomas and prohibited access to religious functions, the only ones accessible to him by his Zaytuna training. He died prematurely, a few years later, victim of misery and denigration.

Haddad's sacrifices have not been in vain. Barely installed in power, Bourguiba had promulgated, in August 1956, the code of personal status mentioned earlier, a code that largely reproduced the proposals contained in the book of Tahar Haddad. The idea of opposing the spirit of the Qur'an to the letter of its text had thus made its way: it became one of the specificities of the religious thought of modern Tunisia.

Chapter 5
New Tracks

Abstract Towards the middle of the twentieth century, reformism experienced a certain slowdown with the rise of national liberation movements, the ideology of progress, and the principle of the equivalence of cultures. It was thus one of the victims of the "defeat" of thought in the face of the hegemony of identity. Official Islam, meanwhile, never recovered from the crisis caused by the abolition of the caliphate, despite the many debates that souhgt to find a way out. The paradigm of *nahda* (rebirth) and *islah* (reform) was everywhere passed on to that of *thawra* (revolution) and *tanmiya* (development). The times were no longer conducive to an in-depth reflection on the reforms that would be necessary in Islam; the "reformist" debate, like so many others, has been overshadowed in the name of preserving national identity. Radical Islamism ended up occupying all the ground, while "Leftism," Nationalism, and Third-World Relativism did not favor the reopening of the files timidly inaugurated by the liberal reformism of the nineteenth century. Short-term political management has everywhere led to the silence of any serious debate on the renewal of religion. So many factors came together to make it difficult to reflect calmly and thoroughly on the theme of the reforms to be envisaged.

Keywords Theological-philosophical renewal · Neo-reformism · Legal modernism · Mystic renewal · Radical critique · Comprehensive history · New Islamology

5.1 A New Social and Cultural Framework

Towards the middle of the twentieth century, reformism experienced a certain slowdown with the rise of national liberation movements, the ideology of progress, and the principle of the equivalence of cultures. It was thus one of the victims of the "defeat" of thought in the face of the hegemony of identity. Official Islam, meanwhile, never recovered from the crisis caused by the abolition of the caliphate, despite the many debates that souhgt to find a way out. The paradigm of *nahda* (rebirth) and *islah* (reform) was everywhere passed on to that of *thawra* (revolution)

M. Haddad, *Muslim Reformism - A Critical History*, Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations 11, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36774-9_5

and *tanmiya* (development). The times were no longer conducive to an in-depth reflection on the reforms that would be necessary in Islam; the "reformist" debate, like so many others, has been overshadowed in the name of preserving national identity. Radical Islamism ended up occupying all the ground, while "Leftism," Nationalism, and Third-World Relativism did not favor the reopening of the files timidly inaugurated by the liberal reformism of the nineteenth century. Short-term political management has everywhere led to the silence of any serious debate on the renewal of religion. So many factors came together to make it difficult to reflect calmly and thoroughly on the theme of the reforms to be envisaged.

However, if religious institutions have not generally been able to take on this task, both classical institutions, such as mosques-universities (al-Azhar and others) and modern institutions, such as universities and research centers, intellectuals have individually conducted systematic reflections in order to chart new perspectives for today's Islam. We can measure the importance of the thoughts thus developed. We will contend ourselves with a brief overview of the trends that have emerged in this area, without ever claiming to be exhaustive: the names here were selected only as representative of these trends, without it thinking that they were the only ones to propose ways of renewal for Islam. There is not enough space to discuss all the works of the characters here mentioned.[1] Only those works that have sparked a debate within the Muslim tradition itself will be taken into consideration. The problem of faith does not matter to us, because the essential goal here is to measure the influence exercised by a work on the conscience of the Muslims themselves. In this rather general framework, it is possible to identify seven main trends that have been shared by contemporary Islam: theological-philosophical renewal, neo-reformism, legal modernism, mystical renewal, radical criticism, comprehensive history, and new Islamology.

5.2 Theological-Philosophical Renewal

During the Medieval Age, Islam had ensured an immense theological and philosophical thought that modern Muslims naturally tried to revive and revisit to serve as a model for a modern Islamic thought. The scholastic phase of Theology was certainly considered decadent and obsolete, but a return to Islam of the classical age (from the tenth to the sixteenth century) was strongly manifested. Some thought they could abolish the scholastic age by returning to classical Islam, just as the European renaissance had shed some theology in exchange for a return to ancient culture.

Abduh's disciple Mustafa Abd al-Raziq, the French co-translator of *R. Tawhid* and rector of al-Azhar from 1945 to 1947, had attended philosophy courses in Paris.

[1] For more developed biographies on some of the thinkers we cite here, we refer to the two following works: Filali Ansari Abdou, *Reform the Islam? An Introduction to Contemporary Debates*, The Discovery, 2003; Benzine Rachid, *The New Thinkers of Islam*, Albin Michel, 2004.

He was later called to teach Islamic philosophy at Cairo University. His courses, which date back to the 1930s, were collected in a book published in 1944 under the title *Tamhid li-ta'rikh al-falsafa l-islamiyya* (Introduction to the History of Muslim Philosophy). In this work, the author gave a glimpse of what he had learned in Paris: Renan's theory that the Semitic race is incapable of producing science and philosophy and Victor Cousin's thesis on the superiority of Christianity and its role in promoting philosophy! However, he did not hold a grudge and was rather admiring of the progress of philosophical reflection in the West. With extraordinary clairvoyance, he warned the Europeans that, if they continued to develop a theory of the superiority of the races, they would soon find themselves submerged by more extreme theories that would show the superiority of the Germanic race over the Western races (Nazism) and that of White people over Black people (racism). It was, oddly enough, a message written long before the horrors Europe experienced in the 1930s and 1940s! For Islam, he proposed a revival of philosophy based on a confused perception that the author had of philosophy; he defined it as "the use of reason." Most of the work is, in the end, only a naive exposition of the theological Islamic philosophy of the classical age and the history of legal schools in Islam!

Uthman Amin had attended Abd al-Raziq's lectures before staying in Paris, where in 1944 he defended a doctoral dissertation on Muhammad Abduh. Back in Egypt, he tried to promote a modern Muslim "philosophy" that he named with an Egyptian term, *gawwaniyya* (philosophy of internalization). The "philosophies" of Amin and Abd al-Raziq, finally, would have been among the anecdotes of the prehistory of modern philosophical teaching in the Arab world if the basic intuition had not been taken up by a philosopher of trade, the contemporary Hasan Hanafi (born in 1935).

After a degree in philosophy at the University of Cairo, Hanafi spent 10 years preparing a philosophy thesis at the Sorbonne (Paris), which gained prominence following his defense of it in 1965. Subsequently, he taught philosophy in Egypt from 1967 to the present day and he is still very active in the philosophical societies of the whole Muslim world: he has Secretary General of the Egyptian Society of Philosophy since 1976, vice-president of the Arab Philosophical Society, etc. He is also the author of about 30 books in French, in English and, of course, in Arabic; additionally, his books are translated into the various languages of Muslim countries.[2]

Hanafi's project was to rewrite the classical religious "sciences" of Islam with the language of modern anthropology using a method that is both hermeneutic and phenomenological. His most famous work is *al-Turath wa al-tajdid* (Tradition and its renewal); it was published in 1980, just a few months after the Islamic revolution in Iran. Like many Muslim intellectuals of his generation, Hanafi was haunted by

[2] In April 1997, Hanafi was the subject of a "decree of excommunication" by the "Front" (*Jabha*) of the *ulema* of al-Azhar (the most radical branch of this *ulema*). A few years earlier, in 1992, a decree issued by the same group against another Egyptian writer, Faraj Foda, paved the way for his assassination a few months later. For further developments on Hanafi thought, cf. Haddad Mohamed, "To understand Hassan Hanafi", Tunis, IBLA, No. 181, 1998, pp. 49–69.

the desire to escape from the reductive dilemma of choosing between classic "colonialist" orientalism and "authentic" Muslim apologetics. He therefore proposed to develop another method of approaching the religious tradition, and in particular with a Muslim character. Influenced by the phenomenology and courses of Paul Ricœur, Hanafi denies history the ability to understand the essence of a religious production and the spirit of a cultural tradition. He thus resorts to hermeneutics, which he nevertheless interprets in a singular way, trying to bring it closer to one of the classical sciences of Islam, that of *Usul al-Fiqh* (improperly translated in general by "the fundamentals of Muslim law," which should be understood as "the basis of exegesis"). Hanafi offers a systematic presentation of the content of this classical science of Islam, apart from his history which, according to him, is anecdotal. Once the essential themes are highlighted, the author extracts them from their particular religious and cultural context, and extrapolates them so that they serve as a generalized exegetical method. Hanafi calls this transposition a move from a religious exegesis that depends on a particular cultural tradition to a philosophical exegesis that has universal value. This method of transposition would be based on three rules or stages – namely reduction, constitution, and extension. It is, in fact, terms borrowed from the modern hermeneutics that Hanafi puts in correspondence with three essential notions of the method elaborated formerly by the Muslim specialists of *Usul al-Fiqh* (they were designated by *tahqiq al-manat*, *tanqih al-manat* and *takhry al-manat*).

It is by applying this "method of global exegesis" to the Islamic theological "science" that Hanafi has attracted the wrath of classical scholars. Indeed, to transpose the religious vocabulary of Islam into a philosophy and an anthropology with universalist claims amounts to revolutionizing this vocabulary. A rewriting of Islamic Theology in modern vocabulary can also mean the shift from God-centered thinking to man-centered thinking. According to the author, the God of theology was formerly only the expression of the ideal man or the superman such that the real man can always dream of being one day. In an important book of five volumes, Hanafi systematically "transposes" the classical vocabulary of Muslim Theology into anthropological terms with a universal vocation.[3]

Two major reservations can be stated in opposition to Hanafi. The first concerns his total rejection of any historical approach to the Muslim tradition. Admittedly, this position is a feature of phenomenology in general and it would be the consequence of the crisis of historical sciences which Hanafi witnessed in Paris at the beginning of the second half of the last century. By refusing the historicity of the Orientalist sciences, he refused all other forms of history and made, in short, the trial of Orientalism the trial of history. One wonders if this radical position does not constitute a way out to prevent the Islamic tradition from being apprehended in its great diversity and "immanence." By condemning any form of history, Hanafi confined himself to practicing a closed speech. According to him, there is only one tradition that must be transposed into a single Theology of national liberation or a

[3] *Min al-aqida ila al-thawra* (From Dogma to Revolution), Beirut, 1988.

revolutionary state (this is the meaning of his book, *From Dogma to Revolution*). He never concealed his admiration for the Nasserist model of the single revolutionary party, although he blamed him for being a model devoid of an ideology of national unity. Hanafi devoted his life's work to proposing such a model.

The second reservation relates to his anti-Western outlook, which became more exasperating as time went on. Admittedly, Hanafi's ideas grew in the context of decolonization, the exaltation of Third-World cultures and the Arab nationalist effervescence of the 1960s. Moreover, to justify himself against conservative scholars, he had to proclaim that his method was inspired solely by his study of the Muslim tradition, thus defying the desire to project Western methodologies on the Islamic tradition. However, by dint of shouting loudly against his opponents, Hanafi seems to have finally been convinced of it! If he had not had teachers such as Massignon, Corbin, Von Grunebaum, and Ricœur, and if he had not read Kant, Heidegger and Husserl, would Hanafi have chosen an identical approach towards of his own tradition? Were Uthman Amin's lectures at Cairo University sufficient to inspire his work? One wonders if, despite the author's audacity in re-reading the Islamic tradition, he would not have ended up substituting one myth for another, that of the world revolution against the West in myth of the local God of Islam. His book *Muqaddima fi ilm al-istighrab* (Introduction to the Science of "Westernism"), which he intended as a counter-project to that of Orientalism, constitutes a masterpiece of Third-World and revolutionary delirium. The political and cultural conditions may have changed since the second half of the last century, but Hanaï persists in his dream of proposing a unique method for a unique science that would serve a single nation!

His Moroccan friend Mohammed Abed Al Jabri (1935–2010) managed to avoid falling into this trap. For him, tradition is not a unique product, since it hosts several competing trends. Since its advent, the Muslim theological tradition has embraced and integrated the Aristotelian, Platonic, and Neo-Platonic philosophies. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) had finally established himself as the leading philosopher, and his works were for a long time taught in religious schools. Ibn Rushd (Averroes), however, was dismissed and remained an almost unknown philosopher, although he remained famous as a jurisconsult (*faqih*). According to Jabri, one should choose a side within these two tendencies that have shared the theological and philosophical tradition of Islam.

In fact, it is since the beginning of the twentieth century that a change of perspective took place in this field. Ibn Rushd was brought back into the conversation thanks to Farah Antun. This Syrian author had given a summary translation of the famous book by Ernest Renan, *Averroes and Averroism* (Paris, 1852), thus triggering, in 1903, a controversy over Ibn Rushd and on the secularism of which we have already spoken. Muslim thought, in search of rationality, then believed to find in Ibn Rushd its master to think.

Jabri is the representative of neo-Averroism in modern Islam. He was probably the historian of philosophy most read in the Arab world during the last two decades of the last century, giving Ibn Rushd a particular and personal interpretation. According to him, the solution proposed by Ibn Rushd to the problem of the

relationship between philosophy (to be understood in the sense of "secular knowledge") and religion was to admit that they constitute two different types of knowledge, each one based on specific postulates. Between the two types of knowledge, there must be no conflict or synthesis, but a kind of sharing of the proper domains. Based on notions borrowed from G. Bachelard and M. Foucault, Jabri proposes to study the Arab-Muslim tradition as it contains three competing epistemological systems. According to him, these systems are *bayan* (knowledge by deduction), *burhan* (knowledge by demonstration) and *irfan* (knowledge by enlightenment).

Bayan encompasses all knowledge that is based on language, primarily knowledge around the Qur'an, grammar and Islamic law, which is supposed to be derived from the sacred texts through the rules of language and rhetoric. *Burhan* means reasoning and encompasses both classical speculative Theology and Arab-Muslim philosophy of Aristotelian inspiration. The *irfan* finally brings together all the knowledge that escapes the first two systems, such as mysticism, Gnostic tendencies, alchemy, etc.

These epistemological systems proved to be dynamic with political motivations that allowed certain "alliances": thus, the *bayan* and the *burhan* were called to ally under the reign of certain Sunni *caliphs* to face down the Shia threat. According to Jabri, it was the Shias who introduced gnosis, alchemy and so-called illuminative metaphysics to shake the foundations of Sunni power. Ibn Rushd, the most Aristotelian of the Muslim philosophers, while also a great *qadi* and Sunni jurist, embodied the culmination of the meeting between the two epistemological systems of *bayan* and *buran*. His solution to the problem of the relationship of religion to philosophy is to be included in this framework. Jabri never hid his goal: for him, it is this "alliance" that should be reinstated today. The religious thinkers of the *bayan* should ally themselves with the secular intellectuals representing the *burhan* to oppose the religion of the *irfan*. Proposed in the context of the turmoil produced by the Islamic revolution in Iran, this conclusion should be translated politically into the following terms: the moderate Sunni, religious and secular, are invited to join forces to confront the Shia danger. Jabri thus reversed the "balance of power" between Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd in the history of Arab thought: by making the first one (who was Persian!) responsible for the decadence of this thought. He created the second as a distant relation for a current revival of it. This renewal should be based simultaneously on the wisdom of reasoning and respect for religion and thus put an end to the conflict between the weighted lay tendency and the moderate religious tendency in modern Sunni thought (which is the majority in the Arab and Muslim world). Jabri went so far as to propose sacrificing the notion of secularization, which is ambiguous in his opinion, and content himself with talking about the rational management of society. A new intellectual and political "re-deployment" would thus make it possible to escape a situation of blockage and inertia that has lasted for too long in Islamic thought, first ancient and then modern.

There is no time to expand on all the positions defended by Jabr, positions which are the consequence of the modern alliance (which he calls his vows) between *bayan* and *buran*, meaning between a moderate and rational "religiosity" and a rationalism that is not excessive yet which still carries weight. Jabri was a prolific

author. Curiously, he has not been translated much into Western languages.[4] It is no coincidence that he began to have a large audience after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and since then the socio-cultural context lent itself to a recreation of divisions on the Arab intellectual scene. Jabri's thought therefore consequently an immense success while also arousing the strongest oppositions. He has been criticized for wanting to spare Islamists and modernists by mediocre and imprecise solutions. Some deplore the fragility of his philosophical positions. Most criticized, according to others, was his bias. It was poorly founded from a historical point of view in favor of Sunnis versus Shiah, Arabs against Persians, *faqihs* against mystics, Maghrebis against the doctors of the Mashriq, etc. Moreover, could Ibn Rushd, who had studied the philosophical problem of reason within the limits of the exercise of thought in the medieval age, still be the master of thought of modern times?

It seems that the most relevant attempt at a theological-political revival was manifested outside the Arab world. It was Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) who was its brilliant representative. To say that he is the spiritual father of Pakistan could be misleading. Certainly, this poet and philosopher dreamed of a Muslim and modern Pakistan, proud and radiant. He dedicated his life to this dream, fighting for Pakistan's separation from India and working for a peaceful pan-Islamism that respects the specificity of each country while ensuring and developing the wealth of a transnational Muslim culture. After successful studies in Lahore, he had stayed in Europe and prepared a degree in philosophy at Cambridge, then taught in Germany before returning to his country in 1908. He left rich and abundant work, a sum of philosophical essays and poems in Urdu, Persian, and English. His most famous is *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1934). It is a very personal synthesis between classical Muslim culture and the modern philosophy of Nietzsche and Bergson, a strong and original synthesis since its author was a connoisseur of both philosophers. As much as he wanted to discover the greatness of classical Muslim philosophy, he placed his thought in the modern developments of the philosophy of religions. He had begun his own reading of the Qur'an and called for the Eastern man, like the Westerner, to find a happy medium between spiritual and material life. Admittedly, Iqbal's Islam wanted to be a militant Islam, but he intended to prolong Islamic mysticism whose story he marvelously developed in another book entitled *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (1908).

Iqbal was an admirer of Rumi, and Goethe and Bergson's influence is felt in all his writings. For him, the blind imitation of the West has caused the East to lose the opportunity to contribute, for its part, to the "construction" of human thought. He therefore deplores this imitation both in the Medieval Age, when the Muslims were Hellenized, and in the Modern Age, when they were Westernized. His models are not the Mu'tazilite rationalists or Ibn Rushd, but rather the Asharite theologian al-Ghazali and the mystic poet Rumi. According to him, progress is above all the business of poets and artists. That is why we should be able to listen again to this great

[4] An anthology is available in French under the title *Introduction to the Critique of Arab Reason*, translated from Arabic and presented by Ahmed Mahfoud and Marc Geoffroy, Paris, La Découverte, 1994.

literature erected to the glory of man, and which extends from the Qur'anic verses to mystical poetry.

The problems posed by Iqbal are nevertheless those of modern thought. When he asks himself, for example, whether religion is still possible, he does not seek the answer in the treatises on classical Muslim Theology. For him, religious life cannot be a progressive degradation from a state of original perfection but, on the contrary, an ascending evolution that follows the curve of the progression of the human mind. For him, there would have been three successive stages: faith, thought and discovery. At the first stage, the man had to passively adhere to the religion of the group. This stage was necessary for the constitution of nations, even if it was not conducive to the emergence of the individual being and spiritual blooming. Then comes the stage of thought: the individual claimed the right to understand and examine the object of his belief. Theology was the product of this stage of human evolution. Finally, man ends up no longer experiencing a metaphysical need, since a new stage had appeared, that of psychology. Man's ambition was henceforth to reach the supreme truth over his being and his destiny, with religion as an individual and free apprehension of his humanity. The believer does not cease to practice his religion, but he sees it with a new and creative eye, explaining in his own psychology the reasons for his religious attachment. The Muslim will read the Qur'an as if it had been personally revealed to him. What Iqbal reproached al-Afghani and Abduh was to have first wanted to renovate Theology rather than go beyond to better consider the psychology of the religious Homo. However, al-Afghani and Abduh were the first to venture in the way of a renovation of Islamic religious thought because, according to Iqbal, they called for a radical reconstruction without turning the back to tradition. Iqbal gave himself the difficult task of defining the new rules of a method that would now allow the spiritual experience in Islam to overcome the heartbreaking dilemma of choosing between atheism and fideism.

According to Iqbal, if there is something to be taken from the Muslim tradition, it is first and foremost its mystical heritage, for it is at this level that one encounters a great wealth of the human experience of the divine. Religious feeling is only an experience and religion is only an effort to understand this experience in terms that are as clear as possible. The mystic tests the validity of his intuitions with spiritual experiences, like the scientist who tests the validity of his hypotheses with laboratory experiments. Both knowledge, physical and spiritual, are equally valid, each according to its own conditions of validity. A spirituality that is at a bygone stage of the religious progress of humanity is a lapsed spirituality. The problem is not, according to Iqbal, to oppose good religions to bad ones, but to see if this or that religion has been able to move to the stage that humanity has already reached in other areas.

According to him, Western thought went too far by asserting that human understanding is incapable of apprehending that which does not belong to the realm of the sensible, whereas Eastern thought went too far in demanding that one detach oneself from the matter. The dialogue between the East and West should be precisely at the level of seeking a middle way, the one that Islam has just encouraged since its

advent. In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, written in the early 1930s, Iqbal issued this warning premonition: the human being cannot be satisfied with material progress, because if secular religions do not renew, humanity will seek to satisfy its spiritual hunger in ideologies of evil – meaning communism and nationalism.

The encounter between religions, for Iqbal, would therefore be facilitated by the interreligious thesis of "monism": being is a unity, God is the world. Not only have all the mystics of all religions come to this conclusion, but it is corroborated by modern physics. It is in this perspective that Islam would unfold in a completely different way. The Qur'an is only a part of the Kitab that encompasses all the eventualities of the universe. Hell and Paradise would not be two places, but two states of spiritual experience. The fall of Adam in the Qur'an is the symbol of the Man who acquires freedom. The Qur'an makes no pronouncement on the origin of the human species, but points out the singularity of man as a free and responsible being. Man is also the only being capable of producing good, for one can speak of Good and Evil only by implying the use of freedom. Far from being a sign of submission, prayer is above all a moment of contemplation on oneself and union with nature. The eternity of the soul, which is taught in the Qur'an, is an old problem that Averroism had thought to solve by analogical reasoning, but it was Nietzsche who, in the end, gave him the solution adequate by showing that everything in the universe consists of an eternal return. The Nietzschean superman is the man who rises from the immediacy of his being by the quest for his essence and his freedom. This is what the Qur'an invites humans to experience, while Western materialism suggests they consider themselves as mere whims of the nature and evolution of species.

By re-reading the Qur'an, as Iqbal does, the Muslim feels hopeful, because he feels he belongs to a vast universe and to participate in an eternal existence. Man thus becomes immortal or eternal, if he wills it: he becomes so through the acts he performs, acts whose prolongations will manifest themselves well beyond his ephemeral life. This is how the poet lives as long as men and women continue to recite his poems. The resurrection of which religions speak to us, Islam included, is not an event that occurs a certain day, but rather the culmination of this progression of the person who tries to realize his humanity. Iqbal was therefore the first to propose this essential idea of modernist Islam, namely that the end of the revelation announced by Islam means the exit of religion and the beginning, for all humanity, of the era of reason.

According to him, a Muslim society must be led by a Muslim state, but only if it is modern, like the (secular) Turkish Republic. Like Abduh, Iqbal rejected the principle of theocracy, just like he refused the idea of nationalism. Pan-Islamism should then be understood as a cultural and spiritual union of all Muslim states, each maintaining its autonomy and trying to do its best for the progress of all Muslims. In doing so, Iqbal was distinguished by a bold interpretation of the principles of the caliphate and *ijtihad*. For him, these two tasks can no longer be exercised by individuals, it is the assembly of elected people that should be the authority to define

Islam and define the interests of the Muslim nation. In this case, the republic turns out to be the only form that allows the material progress of Muslims and their spiritual fulfillment.[5]

5.3 Neo-reformism

Muhammad al-Talbi (Mohamed Talbi) (born in 1921) is probably today the most representative, with his qualities as with his faults, of the trend called neo-Reformism. For this history teacher born in the suburbs of the city of Tunis, Islam was not a late discovery or an ideology suddenly brandished to serve any ideological fight. Islam was a familiar universe in which he had bathed since his early childhood: "The atmosphere was studious at home. The Qur'an was regularly read and chanted. The big family that our home gathered belonged to the brotherhood *qadiriya* and, in the summer, the court became a mosque. My uncle, my grandfather or another man of the family would lead the prayer…"[6] Talbi had always kept alive this spontaneous and natural Islam.

For Talbi, Islam is a belonging, and the question is not whether a membership is based on truth, but whether to respect each other despite the diversity of membership with the goal of coexisting peacefully on Earth. Accepting the other is the key message in Talbi's writings: it results in great tolerance but also, as we shall see, an impasse with respect to the freedom of conscience within the Muslim community. Because for him, the Muslim community is an essence: "The *umma* is above all a Qur'anic concept. It is defined as unique, indivisible, centered on the Lordship and the service of God. The plot is neither racial, nor national, nor cultural, nor social, nor patriotic, neither political, nor geographical."[7] The *umma* is therefore a spiritual datum that does not exclude ethnic and political diversity, but it should not be identified with the *dawla* (Muslim state). And Talbi, the historian, recalls how much the people who form this umma have killed each other, in the course of history, for control of the dawla. Talbi, however, seems willing to use the classic answer (already adopted by Abduh) that is to attribute responsibility to politics (or history) to exonerate the spiritual *umma*. However, the dramas that the *umma* has experienced, over the ages, have rarely been dissociated from its spirituality and its dogmas!

---

[5] The translations of Iqbal into French have unfortunately not enjoyed a large audience; in addition, they do not represent all aspects of his work. *Rebuilding the Religious Thought of Islam* was translated by Eva de Meyerovich and published by Maisonneuve, Paris 1955. We must also note *Message from the East*, translated by E. de Meyerovich and Mohammed Achena, *The Beautiful Letters*, Paris, 1956. The publisher Albin Michel has published *The Book of Eternity* (1962), *The Wing of Gabriel* (1977) and *The Secrets of the Self, The Mysteries of the Not-Self* (1989). The Sindbad publishing house has offered the French-speaking public the translation of another important book, *Metaphysics in Persia*, 1980.

[6] See *Advocacy for a modern Islam*, Tunis /Paris, Ceres/Desclée de Brouwer, 1998, p. 13.

[7] Ibid. p. 35.

The Muslim thinker is therefore the one who assigns as an object to his reflection what Talbi calls the "historical being" of this *umma*. He must practice a sincere *ijtihad* to offer himself the solutions that are necessary in his historical moment. The old *faqih* speaks of good and evil; the modern thinker, conscious of the relativity of all truth, offers solutions without pretending to the infallibility of his propositions. It is all about interpretation because even the historian's view of the societies he studies is an interpretation. But there is always a "sacred" that must be respected, it is the founding document: for the historian, this sacred is the manuscript and, for the Muslim, this sacred is the Qur'an. Talbi sees no difference between the two cases; for him, the historian and the believer have the only step to interpret a text that is posited as a priori! Talbi fiercely fought against any tendency to subject the Qur'an, or even the life of the prophet of Islam, to historical criticism.

Talbi sees in Orientalism only a Christian or Jewish science that speaks of Islam. It is therefore suspicious in all that it advances as a thesis. It is even harmful when it dares devaluing assumptions about Islam. Talbi was particularly offended by the thesis of the Jewish origin of Islam and the Qur'an. His calls for interreligious dialogue and commitment in this direction include a prerequisite that each party must accept the other as it is (i.e. as it presents itself). According to him, making the history of Islam is a task that falls primarily on Muslim historians. Every community must have the opportunity to write their own story. There is no longer any possibility of dialogue if a historical being finds himself fashioned out of his will. The historian does not only say the past, but from this past he defines the solutions to be brought to the problems of the present.

Talbi sums up the philosophical foundation of all his positions in this eloquent formula: "Every idea is at once the meeting of an I and an object. It is the I who takes out the object of nothing, draws it to existence. But by taking it to nothingness, I subjectivize it."[8] In other words, there is no total objectivity, and everything is a question of representation or rather of interpretation; Talbi prefers the second term which belongs more intimately to the religious universe. The most advanced historical methods have their limits which is why they require to be supplemented by "penetrating" readings of the texts. But these readings inevitably involve parts of subjectivity. In other words, one could say that the Muslim thinker has the task of interpreting texts from the Qur'an to documents relating to the history of Islam. Each time, he uses the same approach which consists in applying, in a first step, the modern historical and philological methods which allow a better apprehension by the "I" of its object. Then, in a second step, the most important, he tries to penetrate the deep meaning of the object through a relation of subjectivity between the "I" and this object. Talbi's attitude does not reject historicity, but it is not limited to it either, because it is inspired by the modern hermeneutics that revolted against historicism. Talbi, however, takes it into account in a vision of community conflict management. By consciously admitting this part of subjectivity in each representation, we end up admitting the relativity of each truth and adopting a tolerant attitude towards others.

[8] Ibid. p. 63.

One of Talbi's key ideas was to recognize Muslims' right to modernize without repudiating their faith. Talbi stated that he was ready to lead all the battles of modernity, provided that this took place under the leadership of Islam, reinterpreting its founding texts in the sense of a conciliation with the principles of this modernity. A practicing Muslim and deeply attached to his faith, Talbi disrupts the current opposition of positions between secular modernism and religious conservatism. Hence the audacity of certain positions that Talbi defended in all frankness: the abolition of the penalty of apostasy, the abolition of the inferiority status of non-Muslims in a Muslim society, the abrogation of constitutional articles mentioning Islam as a state religion, etc. Should we then lament an ambivalent position about polygamy?

So how to adopt the principles of modernity without renouncing the demands of Islam? This question can be treated in two parts. The first part stems from the method. Talbi proposes to adopt the "finalist reading" that we have already encountered in classical reformism. He adds a "technique" that he calls the "oriented vector". Talbi believes that any Muslim, historian or exegete in the sense already exposed, will be able to determine, as a perfect geometer, the points that can draw vectors indicating to Muslims the meaning to give to the evolution of their society. For him, this meaning is both wanted by God and determined by man. For example, if Islam has limited polygamy to four wives or confined slavery to war situations, the vector to be deduced is the path towards monogamy or the enfranchisement of slaves. The second part is procedural. Talbi then proposes a new way of practicing *ijtihad* and *ijma*. The *umma*, which had been able to find satisfactory solutions to these problems in the past, should be able to find new ones adapted to its current problems.

Talbi's thought makes it clear that he fits in the category of neo-Reformism, because he pursues, with more daring and finesse, an attitude that has already been encountered in Abduh or ibn Ashur. But we cannot fail to remain perplexed: if the "finalist reading" expresses Islam so profoundly, why have Muslim societies been, and continue to be, the most resistant to the abolition of polygamy and slavery? History clearly illustrates that evolution was not for intrinsic reasons and that it was the pressure of the West that was decisive for changing mentalities to these subjects. On the other hand, it is not clear from history that polygamy was more widespread before Islam. In fact, Muhammad himself was monogamous before Islam and became polygamous afterwards. As for slavery, it has certainly been limited by Islam to war situations; however, the emergence of Islam also triggered a long cycle of armed conflict, making the number of slaves grow in a dizzying way.

What still seems risky to some is to still speak in all certainty of the *umma*, *ijtihad* and *ijma*. However, current Islam has its own authorities: the Islamic conference, the association of Muslim scholars, ISESCO, etc. Talbi has never been admitted to any of them. The *ijma* is thus done without him, and the *umma* seems to spare themselves of his services! Hence the fragility of Talbi's situation who is the advocate of a system that could, in the last instance, turn against him. He could have suffered the fate of the Sudanese Taha (which will be discussed later) if he did not have the chance to live in peaceful Tunisia. He could have been condemned in the name of the *umma* and by virtue of the principle of the *ijma* he defends. Having

called with boldness and perseverance to "break the lock of the Shariah," one would be tempted to say that this lock will jump only by a deconstruction beforehand of the notion of the monolithic *umma* and the infrangible authority of the *ijma*, for these are the two pillars on which the Shariah rests.

Another question is what the "other" means to Talbi: would he be the member of a different community or just another individual? Modernity would require that one sees the other (and oneself) above all as an autonomous subject and that all right, including that of being respected, is due to him or her as an individual. Talbi seems rather to pose tolerance as a rule of management between communities. Certainly, he insists on the right of everyone to break his ties with his or her community, each Muslim being free to deny Islam. But, for Talbi, there is always a community that transcends the individual. He has the right to detach himself from it, but not to subvert it. Talbi was one of the first to openly advocate the abdication of the pain of apostasy in Islam and respect for atheism as a philosophical position, but his anathemas against an Arkoun or a Djaït assign strange limits to the tolerance he advocates. Did he not forge for it the Arab neologism of *insilakhslami* ("de-Islamized") which risks becoming as formidable as the medieval term of *zindiq* (atheist, heretic).

Talbi seems to be attached to a communitarian vision, hence his uncompromising attachment to the principles of *umma* and *ijma*. This is also what drives him to advocate for Anglo-Saxon secularization based on community coexistence. According to him, the Charter of Medina, contracted between Muhammad and tribes of different religions, constitutes in this respect an Islamic proto-democracy. One wonders whether the dialogue of religions or the depoliticization of the state can constitute sufficient guarantees for the protection of the most "subversive" individuals in society. Does the dialogue of religions, if it does not lead to a first questioning of oneself, still have all its value? An endogenous modernity is an attractive wish, but are there not historical realities that are tenacious and that a historian cannot evade? Be that as it may, Talbi has succeeded in challenging the classical cleavage of Muslim intellectuals between traditional religious and secular modernists.

5.4 Legal Modernism

Legal modernism is an attitude that views all the concepts and categories used by classical Islamic thought as obsolete in order to manage social problems. According to legal modernism, modernity has imposed notions and categories radically different and unrelated to the previous ones. Modernism has manifested itself mainly in the legal field, with a strong focus on the application of the Shariah in Muslim societies, and it is lawyers who have answered this call with criticism of classical Islamic "law" from the principles of modern law.

Aa lawyer and connoisseur of the Muslim tradition, Muhammad Said Ashmawi, an Egyptian faced with a strong surge of Islamism in his country, can claim to be one of the pioneers of this method. His leading book on the subject is *al-Islam*

al-siyasi (Political Islam); written in Arabic, it was quickly translated into French and English.[9] As it was published in 1987, he narrowly avoided being blacklisted by al-Azhar, but continued to be attacked by both fundamentalists and official *faqihs*.

To limit the religious intrusion into public order, the political powers in the Muslim world have become accustomed to a strategy of playing off the rivalry between the conservative Islam of official institutions and fundamentalist Islam of Islamist movements. However, since the end of the 1970s, Egypt has proved that this strategy has limits and that it can even turn against those who resort to it. Conservative and fundamentalist Islam, although having different doctrinal and hermeneutical bases, can lead to a division of roles: the first attacks intellectuals and artists and is responsible for the re-Islamization of society from above (through religious education, revision of laws, etc.) and the second attacks the political class itself and works to re-Islamize from below. Muftis who issue condemnation in the name of the religious tradition, and fundamentalists who execute the sentence testify the most perverse reunion of this macabre sharing of roles that does not say his name. The assassination of the Egyptian writer Farag Fouda, on June 8th 1992, was the most obvious example.

For Ashmawi, it is time to end this appeal to conservative Islam in order to oppose fundamentalism and thereby to seek another method to fight against it. Ashmawi offers one. It is an update, in a way, to the method that was used by Ali Abd al-Raziq in his book *Islam and the foundations of power*. The theses of Islamists could be defeated through a more authentic Islam and a more "fundamental" reading. The title of Ashmawi's book, *Political Islam*, thus reverses (in a pejorative sense) the term "Islamic politics" used by Islamists. His main thesis is primarily a defense of Islam against those who have undermined him, meaning the *faqihs* and the militant Islamists: "God wanted Islam as religion, men turned it into politics. Religion is human and universal, while politics can only be limited, partial, sectarian and temporary." To limit religion to politics is to constrain it to narrowness, to make it prisoner of a specific domain, of a particular group, and of a definite period. While religion addresses what is most sublime in man, politics awakens in man the most vile and regressive inclinations. To practice religion in the name of politics or politics in the name of religion is to open the way to endless conflicts, where everything becomes a question of power and loot. The consciences are then perverted and the spiritualities blurred. Politicizing religion or simply giving politics a religious appearance is an act of robbery or of uneducated persons. This is how opportunism is justified by religion, injustice by scriptural justifications, greed by elements of law, delinquency by a semblance of piety, violence by a so-called act of devotion.

Going to war against this undeclared alliance between the *faqihs* and the Islamists, in addition to the so-called Islamic banks who play the role of their backers, Ashmawi does not use any modern theories or Western philosophies. It is only in categories and references familiar to Muslim culture that he draws his arguments.

[9] *Al-Islam al-siyasi*, 1st ed. 1987. 4th ed., Cairo, Medbouli al-saghir, 1996, translated into French under the title *Islamism against Islam*, Ed. La Découverte, 1990.

He recalls, for example, the classic debate between orthodox Muslim theologians: what position should a pious Muslim adopt? Should he/she serve the power or distance himself from it as much as possible? He concludes that if the old faqihs asked the question in this form, it was because, according to them, they had to consider only these two solutions. Thus, after consideration, the two terms of the alternative lead to the same result, namely the absence of a so-called "Islamic" political thought. The *faqihs* who chose to serve political authority have only justified the acts of the latter, and those who chose to move away have lost all experience of politics. The Islamist movements claim to be the heirs of an alleged Muslim political theory that never existed!

According to Ashmawi, Muslims have resigned themselves for centuries to separate politics and religion. It was only when the caliphate was abolished in 1924 that the illusion of an Islamic government made its appearance. This illusion was based on the so-called principle of the *hakimiyya*: governance is the responsibility of God and man only executes the orders. This is simply an alibi for tyrants, because it has never been retained by the majority of Muslims, except the minority sect of the Kharijites who had made it its own. If it regained life in modern times, it was thanks to Abul A'la Maududi who lived in India, in a largely non-Muslim society, which was influenced by Hindu nationalism. Transposing the ideal of Maududi to societies in which almost the entire population is Muslim is therefore, for Ashmawi, an aberration.

According to him, moreover, Islam is closer to Christianity than to Judaism. Moses was a legislator because three out of the five books of the Jewish Torah are devoted to law. If the Qur'an contains just over 6000 verses, only 200 of them are devoted to certain aspects of the law. The Message of Islam has therefore not made legislation its main objective, because it is first and foremost, like Christianity, a message of mercy and moralization.

Ashmawi's book abounds with information drawn exclusively from the Muslim tradition, so he does not found theories but attempts to make this tradition work against the Islamism that claims it and to pave the way for an Islam that works against Islamism. The effect of his method on the Muslim reader is most considerable. We know that God's theory of the *hakimiyya*, which is the keystone of Islamism, is based on a scriptural argument that claims to be "decisive," namely verse 5:44: "Those who do not judge from what God has revealed are ungodly." But Muslim societies today refer to positive law, so much so that they have left Islam and must be re-Islamized: this is the argument mainly used by supporters of Islamism. Now, if we read this verse in its context, both semantically and historically, we realize that it does not speak about Muslims, but rather about Jews: it seems to say that a Jew who does not refer to the Torah is a Jew who betrays his/her religion. Nothing to do with Muslim societies and their codes of legislation! According to Ashmawi, the term *hukm* used in the Qur'an does not mean 'government' but rather 'arbitration' or 'wisdom in conflict management,' except in verses dealing with Jews and their kings.

Similarly, according to him, the term Shariah is improperly translated as "Islamic law," while its meaning in the Qur'an corresponds to that of "path (wisdom)."

Islamic law is called *fiqh*, which everyone admits is a human construct. The positive law as applied in the Muslim countries, if it is not strictly in accordance with the so-called ancient *faqihs*, is not therefore any less in contradiction with the Shariah the path traced by the Qur'an, which contains only a few legislative provisions. Both the conservative and the fundamentalist thinkers refer to other verses to establish their authority, such as the following: "If you ignore something, ask the people who have the *dhikr* (the Recall)" (16:43). They claim that it is they who have *dhikr*, that is, the science of Muslim law. However, whenever the word *dhikr* is used in the Qur'an, it does not refer to the Qur'an or to Islamic Law, but rather to the Torah! Judging by this occurrence: "We wrote in the Psalms after the *dhikr* (Recall): Truly, my righteous servants will inherit the earth" (21:105). This *dhikr* is anterior to the Psalms, so it cannot be the Qur'an, let alone the Muslim law schools, since the *dhikr* refers to the Torah that came earlier than the Psalms.

As we see, aside from this based argumentation, on the same texts used by Islamists, Ashmawi proposes others based on the absurdity implied by the application of what we call Muslim Law. For example, traditional law schools do not define theft as embezzlement of public goods or personal enrichment through bribery. It states that he who steals a hen will have his hand cut off, while he who appropriates millions unduly will not be liable to this terrible punishment. Islamists claim that modern governments have turned their backs on Islam and demand that we return to the previous situation. But what was the situation like? In Egypt, for example, until the overthrow of Mamluk Power by Bonaparte, the Ottoman system prevailed. It consisted in appointing judges by califal decree, who had no salaries and had to be paid by the litigants. In addition, they had to pay part of their resources to the caliphal administration to ensure that they were kept at their posts. One can then imagine the extent of corruption that corroded the judicial system. Moreover, these judges had jurisdiction only in civil cases, while other cases were at the responsibility of governors who themselves were not bound by any legislation. This was truly the legal system that the Islamists would like to restore.

Therefore, it turns out that the call to apply Shariah is a slogan invented by Islamism that has no basis in tradition; and the same is true of the idea of the establishment of a "Muslim government." On this second point, Ashmawi espouses Abd al-Raziq's thesis: Islam has not prescribed any particular mode of government. The so-called religious government is, according to him, a survival of the Pharaonic religion which saw in the Pharaoh a divine person, because Islam gives neither the holder of the power nor the judge of the court the right to speak in the name of God.

The *jihad* problem is also part of this same perspective of perversion of tradition. Indeed, the term *jihad* has several meanings in the Qur'an. It was used in the Qur'an in its Meccan period, and it is unanimously accepted that the authorization given to Muslims to use weapons to defend themselves predates this period, because *jihad* meant, for the first believers, to fight against pressures to push them to retract from Islam. It meant, in other verses, sacrificing one's money in order to spread the new Message. The authorization to use weapons to defend oneself was a special case of *jihad* and was thus an exceptional disposition. On the other hand, the rule was to practice *jihad* on oneself to overcome temptations and vices. The *faqihs*, servants of

the political powers, perverted Islam by turning the exception into a rule. They extrapolated a particular situation to make a permanent war against non-Muslims, while renouncing the duty to improve morally.

It remains to be known on what elements Islamism succeeds in establishing its bases, if it turns out that tradition does not support it. These elements, according to Ashmawi, which are four-fold, are to be found in the historical situation of the modern Muslim world: firstly, colonization has led Muslims to use the expression 'Islamic government' to express their refusal to be ruled by strangers; secondly, the Israeli-Arab conflict has acquired a strong religious connotation, Israel being perceived as a Jewish state (in the religious sense of the term) with the fate of Jerusalem at the center of this conflict since 1967; thirdly, the tyranny of Muslim governments has engendered the exasperated feeling of a threat to Islam and a challenge from the outside to escape internal challenges; and fourthly, oil has given the Wahhabi Kingdom, and subsequently the "Iranian Revolution," a great capacity for interference and nuisance to the entire Muslim world.

But we must remember that the key principle of Islamism, *hashimiyya*, came from India through the famous Maududi. Indian Islam was a minority religion confronted with Hindu nationalism. To compete with it, Maududi saw fit to turn Islam into a nationalist ideology. When the secular Arab nationalism was severely defeated in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, "Islamic nationalism" replaced it by assuring the leadership of the Muslim world, which was made easier as the war of 1967 confronted secular Arab nationalism with Jewish nationalism, which in the eyes of the Arabs was considered a religious ideology. At the very heart of this war, was there no concern for the Jews to become the masters of Jerusalem? It was this event that immediately motivated the creation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and other organizations controlled by Wahhabis. Defeated and humiliated, Nasser eventually joined the League of Muslim States, which he had fiercely opposed at the start. Penetrating in Egypt, Islamism had finally spread throughout the Arab world. The Iranian revolution, which was also a Shia nationalist subversion of Islam, later came to aggravate this "political nationalization" of Islam. But, for Ashmawi, Islam still remains a religion which strives to be universal and which thereby cannot accommodate any nationalism.

The Tunisian jurist Muhammad al-Sharfi (Mohamed Charfi) is also to be classified in this modernist current. His book *Islam and Freedom: the historical misunderstanding* (1998), offers one of the most rigorous and systematic answers to Islamism's interpretation of Islam. The book, published before 9/11, places the problem of Islamism in a broader context, namely that of the global rise of fanaticism, particularly in societies from monotheistic cultures. Islam is therefore part of this phenomenon, probably according to a particular intensity. Although he came out of the neo-Reformist movement, Charfi believes no less that Islam is as capable as the other two monotheisms to evolve and adapt to modernity. Moreover, he rightly points out that most Muslim societies have evolved willy-nilly, and that few still practice corporal punishment or prohibit interest-bearing loans. Thus, many changes are underway, but cultural references and political speeches do not follow. It is for this reason that the changes remain fragile and revocable.

"Modern" Muslim, according to Charfi, are divided between two different and opposing visions of the world in which they finds himself: on the one hand, they mentally live in the past world of the *umma*, of the caliphal system, of the Shariah, of the authority of men of religion, of law based on punishments, etc. On the other hand, they confront the modern yet fragile notions of the nation, of the state, of popular sovereignty, of positive law, of parliament, of rehabilitation of offenders, etc. Charfi names this phenomenon "hesitant modernity." For him, there is no way to get out of this schizophrenia and to adopt a duly assumed modernity. The remaining factor is to solve the relationship between modernity and Islam, hence the historical misunderstanding that it is high time to resolve. Mohamed Charfi's reflection develops according to four axes: Islamic fundamentalism, religion & law, religion & the state, and education & modernity. It is understood that this is, in any case, a critical reflection against fundamentalism and the solutions that it intends to propose on these themes.

It is interesting to reread today, after the events of September 11th, 2001, the section devoted by Mohamed Charfi to Muslim fundamentalism. This serves as a reminder that the horrors of this fundamentalism have not started with the victims of the World Trade Center. Muslims were the first victims: starting in 1990, it killed thousands of innocent people, particularly in Egypt and in Algeria. The essence of fundamentalism, according to Charfi, is the idea of *jihad*. Muslim culture praises violence with the merits of *jihad*, considered the most beautiful act of devotion. The fundamentalists have allowed themselves to commit the vilest acts in the name of religion because they have been taught that it is by *jihad* that Muslims gain a good place in paradise. Muslim fundamentalism lays claim, to apply the Shariah, a method, and to use violence, and it has two phobias: women and the West. In other words, as long as the dominant culture continues to promote this representation, the Muslim's shift to fundamentalism and the fundamentalist's shift to violence will remain real threats. Only a profound revision of Muslim thought and curricula could remedy this situation. According to Charfi, for almost two centuries, meaning since the eruption of modernity in the Muslim world, the battle between fundamentalism and Reformism has been rough. But this battle should not be interpreted as an opposition between Islam and modernity. Today's fundamentalists are the descendants of yesterday's Conservatives. For Charfi, Islamism is to be distinguished from Islam: it is a religious belief, a vision of life and death and a set of rituals whose observance is left to the free personal decision of each believer.

This analysis, however, could be partly disputed by the fact that Charfi seems to confuse the conservative attitude (the Islam of Zitouna, for example) and the radical attitude of the fundamentalists. The two are similar in certain respects but they are far from being in the same line: the conservatives intend to be faithful to a tradition, while the fundamentalists seek to impose it on society. Conservatism and fundamentalism thus come under two different logics that cannot be approached and criticized in the same way.[10] The political powers have often resorted to rivalry between

[10] When, in the faculties of Law, they wanted to make a concession to Tradition, they introduced a

the two to better neutralize them, avoiding to open a real debate on the problems of religion in a society that calls itself modern and faithful to its past. This "negative" strategy appears as a pragmatic and political solution to the problem. It would therefore be up to the intellectuals to adopt positive strategies and to seriously discuss the metamorphoses of the sacred. Some did not have the audacity to confront these sensitive subjects, some were absorbed by the direct militancy, and others finally went to Stalin and Mao for their "sacred books."

Charfi abstains from criticizing the left wing, of which he was an early leaders, even if he has not always shared its dogmatism. However, the Left, especially in Tunisia, took seriously the problem of religion only at a later stage. It has long lived in the illusion that the progress of modernity is implacable and that the disappearance of religion and the disenchantment of the world will be the inevitable consequences. Charfi's book would have been an antidote to Muslim fundamentalism if it had appeared a few decades earlier, when fundamentalism was still in its early stages, and if it had proposed in time positive and reconciling solutions between the Islam and modernity.

However, Charfi is distinguished from many others by a more realistic and pragmatic sense of things, which allowed him to tackle the complexity of the problem. According to him, what is called "Islamic law" falls into three categories in relation to fundamentalists: firstly what they accept to forget, secondly what they want to forget, and thirdly what they want to restore. In the first category, institutions that have fallen into disuse are placed on their own. In the second, we find the troublesome practices like slavery. In the third, criminal law, personal status and issues of freedom of conscience are discussed. Why then would we accept the abolition of slavery and not that of polygamy, asks Charfi?

And Charfi to use the same reasoning for all that, in Muslim law, proves incompatible with individual freedoms: anti-feminist discrimination (including polygamy and repudiation), the status of non-Muslims, the crime of apostasy, and corporal punishment (including the death penalty for apostate and death by stoning for adultery). These provisions of Muslim law, moreover, are not always based on Qur'anic foundations, even if some had been considered progress in their time, such as tolerance vis-à-vis the non-Muslim, while they are now outdated in today's world. All the harm comes from assimilating Islam to a law while it is a morality. The conclusion thus derived that Muslim law was based on a fundamental triple inequality: the superiority of the man over the woman, that of the Muslim over the non-Muslim, and that of the free person over the slave. It must be borne in mind, however, that the

---

discipline called "Muslim law." It was thought that it would be a mere accessory, and now it has become a great rival to the teaching of law. However, the notion of "Islamic law" is not an idea of tradition. On the contrary, the Arabic term meaning right (*qanun*) had no religious connotation in Tradition. The term used in the Tradition is *fiqh*, which means hermeneutics of the sacred texts. The French translation accentuates the amalgamation by making the "right" a correspondent of Shariah and *fiqh* (moreover, these last two terms are not synonymous with the point of view of the Muslim tradition). Charfi himself falls into this linguistic trap by writing, for example: "Shariah or *fiqh*, that is, classical Islamic law, is a corpus of legal rules" (*Islam and freedom: the historical misunderstanding*, 61).

faqihs, probably conscious of the severity of their laws, had been able to introduce accommodations, without however undermining these inequalities but as exceptions of non-applicability.

Charfi's reflection on the relationship between Islam and the state takes up the thesis already mentioned of Ali Abd al-Raziq: for him, the so-called Islamic State was constituted after the death of the Prophet of Islam and is therefore not a religious state. We will come back to this question later, because Charfi does not rank among the neo-Reformists. Certainly, if he presents the history of modern Islam as a struggle between reformism and fundamentalism, it is to defend the positions of a secular modernism. To the neo-reformists like Talbi and Taha, he reproached to plead for a religious right to be replaced by another. But, fundamentally, doesn't Charfi resume the arguments of the neo-Reformists in all their developments? And could he do otherwise, at the risk of confusing Islam and Islamism?

Charfi, who was one of the leaders of the Tunisian Left, became for a time President of the Tunisian League of Human Rights and then Minister of Education from 1989 to 1994, which gave him field experience; his polemical skills have been matched by those of a manager looking for concrete solutions to problems. Following such a route, he could afford to say that French laïcité is not transposable in the Sunni Muslim world. The latter does not tolerate the state being able to evade its religious obligations. Rather than considering a separation between Islam and the state, Charfi proposes to ensure a separation between the state's religious and political function. Concretely, this would result in the introduction, under Montesquieu's principle of the separation of powers, of a fourth power that would be represented by a sort of Religious Affairs Management Council. This Council would be responsible for dealing with the religious "obligations" of society, such as the construction of mosques and the designation of imams. The lawyer Hamadi Redissi fears, for his part, that the establishment of such an official "authority": in matters of religion does not strengthen the religious character of the state. He is not entirely wrong, especially since religious authorities independent of the state exist in certain countries and sometimes prove more suffocating than fundamentalist groups. Charfi would have been inspired by the Tunisian experience of a Higher Islamic Council, but it is the public authorities, in this case, who would appoint the members, which seems to be an impracticable solution in the current state of Muslim societies, because – and Charfi concedes – the fundamentalists would then be best placed to dominate this Council in case of democratic election. The real solution therefore remains, according to him, to modernize education, which would limit the effects of fanaticism and allow the constitution of this religious power. But in this case, who would decide on the modernization of education? Are school curricula often not reflective of the culture of the majority? These are important questions that Charfi did not provide appropriate answers to.

5.5 The Mystic Renewal

On January 18th 1985, the Sudanese dictator Jafar Numayri authorized the hanging of a 76-year old Muslim mystic for apostasy: this was an unprecedented event at the end of the twentieth century. However, the protests in the West were rather few, if not nonexistent. Numayri thought he could save his fragile regime by deserting the Eastern bloc he was allied with to join the West. Faced with his people overwhelmed by misery and illiteracy, he claimed to be *amir al-mu'minin* (commander of the believers) and preached the immediate and total application of Shariah. Strongly supported by Hasan Turabi, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Numayri inaugurated one of the darkest phases in Sudan's history, but managed to stay in power only for a very short time until he was overthrown by a military coup in April 1985.

The Muslim mystic and victim of this failing megalomaniac was called Mahmud Muhammad Taha, a man hitherto completely unknown outside Sudan, author of several pamphlets on the renovation of Islam. Numayri had chosen to carry out his sentence of apostasy pronounced 17 years earlier (in 1968) to prove his determination to make Sudan a truly Islamic country. Taha's ideas had remained unknown until then. One of his disciples, Abdullahi Ahmed an-Na'im, spread them by translating his most important treatise into English, *The Second Message of Islam* (New York, Syracuse University, 1987). Taha was thus known than more than a political opponent who succumbed to the arbitrariness of a dictatorship: he was also a genuine thinker. To understand his main thesis, one must be well informed of the techniques of "abrogation" in Islam. The fact is that interpreters and *faqihs* have long noted that the Qur'an contains conflicting messages. The historian believes that this stems from the multiple episodes of Muhammad's biography (*sira*). But for a theologian who considers that the Qur'an is the eternal word of God, the historical explanation alone cannot be retained. We have therefore resorted to the thesis of "abrogation": late verses repeal earlier, contradictory ones by the eternal will of God, keeping the status of the divine Word. The *faqihs* numbered these verses to a few dozen and have inventoried them with somewhat precision.

Taha has made the principle of abrogation the central theme of his doctrine. According to him, it is not only a few verses that repeal others, but a whole part of the Qur'an that repeals another part. The Meccan Qur'an (revealed in Mecca, according to Muslim tradition) stated the true principles of Islam, such as those of equality, freedom, peace, love of science, etc. The Arabs refused this Message and forced Muhammad to flee Mecca. It was then that the period of the Qur'an in Medina began, which delivered a Message less demanding than the previous one so that it could be accepted by the new disciples. A Shariah was promulgated, which remained below the Meccan ideal, so that it could be applied in society.

What then became of the Meccan ideal? According to Taha, it was purposely preserved in the Qur'an itself to be able to come to life again the day when humanity would be ready to welcome it and make it the principle of its individual and collective life. He believes that this day has arrived since humanity has reached its highest level of civilization since its existence on earth. This is what Taha calls the Second

Message of Islam, which should today repeal the First Message, the one that has prevailed since the Hegira of Muhammad in Medina.

Taha calls to another religion, claimed his detractors! Nothing is more wrong. Indeed, to better understand his ideas, we must put his teaching in the context of Sudan. Sudan is a land of messianism. In 1881, a man who called himself Mahdi had succeeded in being recognized as the religious leader of the Sudanese; he had severely beaten the English army and many Sudanese thought he was the Muslim messiah (*al-mahdi*) called to restore Islam to its greatness. The announcement, made by Taha, of a second Message is not unusual in such a context. Moreover, the descendants of the Mahdi continue until today to enjoy a high prestige among the Sudanese and to play leading political roles.

We must also consider the mystical filiation of Taha. Indeed, Islamic mysticism is accustomed to distinguish the *nubuwwa* (prophecy) from the *walaya* (authority of the saint), which reduces the rigidity of the dogma of the "prophecy" supported by *faqihs*. One could even argue that the *walaya* was a parade that allowed the *wali* (saint) to be invested with an authority as important as that of the Prophet. Even if he does not say a word in his writings, Taha seems to be invested with this function for the present time, like other mystics who preceded him. The conflict between the *faqihs* and the Sufis is very old indeed, and it is thus that Taha suffered the same fate as Hallaj (922) or Suhrawardi (1191), both executed in the Middle Ages for the crime of apostasy.

The idea of a second Message of Islam amounts firstly to denying all authority. It implies that Muslims must refer henceforth to the foundations of Islam and no longer to the prescriptions of the Shariah, meaning to the principles set forth by the Meccan Qur'an and not to the legal provisions contained in the Medinan Qur'an which was later codified by the *faqihs*. According to Taha, Islam has affirmed the principle of "freedom of belief" in the Qur'an while allowing war only because the seventh century believers have not lived up to this principle and did not allow Muslims to freely profess their faith. It proclaimed the principle of "equality between men" but was forced to deal with slavery at a time when it was still permitted, so Islam then limited it without abolishing it completely. It stated the principle of "gender equality" but accepted polygamy, repudiation, and the veil because women were not yet ready to evade the guardianship of men; polygamy was thus limited to four co-wives and the repudiation required the obligation of financial compensation while waiting for better days. It envisaged the principle of "socialism in economic matters" but allowed a capitalist economy because men had not yet reached the necessary level that requires self-sacrifice. It recommended the principle of "political democracy" but contented itself with *shura* (consultation), an intermediary between the sovereignty of the people and the tyranny of the prince, for the people were still unable to enjoy their full sovereignty. It exalted the primacy of individual dignity, but organized communitarianism into societies where it was difficult to live alone, apart from one's tribe.

All of Taha's affirmations have been supported by a careful reading of Qur'anic verses in their favor, even if it contains at times strange interpretations, similarly to that of the mystics. This is how he relies on verse 39:18: "Announce the good news

to my servants who listen to the Word and obey what it contains best" to see in "the best of the Divine Word" which is most suited to the time period. According to Taha, every verse of the Qur'an has two possible meanings, an immediate meaning and a deep meaning. The first was given to the *mu'minun*, those who are challenged by the First Message, the second will be discovered by the *muslimun*, those who are challenged by the Second Message.

For Taha, the first Message was only a preparation for the second, having put the humans on the right path so that they finally reach a level of civilization allowing them to apply the foundations of Islam without any concession. It is in this sense that one should understand, according to him, the establishment of an Islamic Government: this one would not be based on the application of the Shariah of the seventh century, but on a globalized governance which would be based on a universal right whose principles are contained in the Meccan Qur'an, especially those of freedom, equality, and socialism. The Islamic Government would not oppose Western and modern civilization, but would rather complete it and make it avoid many mistakes by giving it the moral and spiritual base that it lacks.

For Taha, human history developed into two periods that saw successively the reign of fear, then the reign of justice. Whoever lived under the reign of fear sold his freedom to be protected by one stronger than himself: the subject by the prince, the slave by the master, the worker by the capitalist, the woman by the man. The First Message of Islam was concerned with alleviating the burdens on man, but it lacked the knowledge necessary to free him from the motives of fear. The Western Scientific Revolution has led to this term, but the consumer society it engendered has not been able to radically solve the problem. It drove fear out of man's heart through the unbridled pursuit of pleasure, which provoked another form of fear, that of not being able to satisfy his own pleasures. Islam proposes better, because it transfers all the impulses of fear to a serene submission to a transcendent God: in doing so, man is no longer afraid of nature or his kind, so he refuses consequently any superstition and submission to anyone. He then accepts, calmly and with great courage, to confront by his own strength all the adventures of life.

Therefore, for Taha, the time for an Islamic Government has come, in the sense of a conjunction between a civilization that has reached its highest degree of progress and a spiritual message that remains buried in the Meccan Qur'an. This Government is made possible by the degree of civilization currently achieved by humans and by their need to find a way of balance in all areas. The Islamic Government would therefore mean the abolition of all forms of discrimination, including religious discrimination, because anyone who accepts the principles of freedom, equality, and socialism must be considered as Muslim and adept in the Second Universal Message of Islam.

The question of an Islamic Government, however, is not at the center of the Second Message. It is aimed primarily at individuals. According to Taha, the individual takes precedence over the community, even in prayer, because he classifies it into two categories: the Shariah prayer, which consists of a series of acts codified by *faqihs* and is practiced a few minutes a day, and the prayer of the *haqiqa* (the spiritual truth) which is the permanent connection of man with God. Taha probably takes

up here an old mystical idea according to which the spiritual man, who arrived at a certain degree of meditation, can do without the collective worship and its ritual obligations. Certainly, he does not say it explicitly, because everyone knows that this is one of the most controversial subjects in Islam, subject of many discords between *faqihs* and Sufis, so much so that the latter, under the threat of being accused of apostasy, have finally abandoned it. We then understand the risk that Taha took this way by pushing his reflections to the most forbidden areas.

5.6 The Radical Critique

With the *Naqd al-fikr al-dini* (Critique of Religious Thought)[11] by the Syrian Sadiq Jalal al-Azm (born in 1934), we are faced with a frontal critique of religion inspired by Marxist philosophy subtler and finer than the dogmatic Marxist writings on this subject. Al-Azm is a graduate from the American University of Beirut, then from Yale in the United States. The publication of his book in 1969 led to a charge of incitement to hatred and a few days of pre-trial detention, before being cleared by the Lebanese courts.

It must be noted that the book was published in a very specific context. In 1967, Arab armies suffered a bitter failure against Israel, leading to the large loss of Palestinian territories, including the city of Jerusalem. Unlike the defeat of 1948, dubbed *al-nakba* (disaster), that of 1967, called *al-naksa* (relapse), was the responsibility of the so-called progressive Arab regimes. A violent debate had thus broken out, in which there was an extreme radicalization of the intellectual positions. For some, this defeat was a kind of divine chastisement against societies that had sold their faith and their identity; for the others, it was the inevitable consequence of the Arab hesitation to step into the world socialist movement and marry the Marxist thought that had enabled the Vietnamese and other socialist peoples to win their brightest of victories.

Al-Azm was obviously among the supporters of the second movement. For him, Muslims live a mental world opposed to modernity: they cannot be worthy of this world if they continues to believe in the material existence of angels, of demons and witchcraft, and of religious legends. The religious mentality has irretrievably fallen into disuse due to the advent of technology and new forms of social and economic organizations. Religion is at best an excuse for reactionary regimes, but so-called progressive regimes have not assumed the necessary cultural revolution, having chosen median positions that prove to be alienating as well as inefficient.

Al-Azm denounced the Arab eclecticism and the political recovery of the religion which had increased in the most ridiculous way after the defeat of the Arab armies during the war of 1967. The so-called progressive regimes in turn compromised in order make use of religion and better manipulate their populations. They

[11] *Naqd al-Fikr al-Dini,* Beirut, Dar al-Tali'a, 1st ed. 1969, 9th ed. 2003.

encouraged speeches of repentance to make them forget their responsibility in defeat. Among the most striking events of this kind, al-Azm cited that of the alleged appearance of the Virgin Mary in a Coptic church in Egypt: the Nasser regime, supposedly socialist and progressive, had mobilized all its administrative and media resources to spread the news of this "miracle." He would have exploited it by suggesting that Mary, a figure of holiness among Christians and Muslims, had come to remind the Egyptians that God supported them in their common struggle against the Jews, and that while waiting to recover the holy Jerusalem, the believers could be content with a pilgrimage to the city of his appearance. Was not this a blatant example of the "progressive" good use of religion?

According to al-Azm, Arab eclectism in the face of the religious problem is expressed in many ways. First there is rhetorical eclecticism. If one writes, for example, that God is Truth, His Word cannot fall into contradiction with scientific truths. This kind of argument is, for him, purely rhetorical, because only language allows us to posit this postulate of God as Truth and thus to oppose science that is concrete truth. Among the artifices of theoretical argumentation, he notes, for example, denying the existence of legends in Islam. But what about stories about Adam's creation or witchcraft as reported in the Qur'an? Can we be content to reply that the Qur'an has constantly called for knowledge (*ilm*)? However, the Qur'anic *ilm* does not mean scientific knowledge, but only knowledge of God and religious "truths." It is therefore not enough to manipulate the vocabulary to solve the problem of the contradictions between science and religion.

A second form of eclecticism consists in making religion a tool of justification. Under the revolutionary socialist regimes, didn't men of religion eagerly demonstrate that the essence of religion is revolt against injustice, whereas, under conservative regimes, they presented it as the guardian of the established order and reactionary values? Now, al-Azm asserts, a chameleonic religion loses all credibility, and eclecticism turns out to be a subterfuge in evading a clear attitude to the problems posed by the era in which one lives.

The abusive reading of the sacred scriptures is a third form of eclecticism. This entails pretending that the Scriptures already contained the very principles of modern science. According to a supporter of this method, the Qur'an contains 61 verses of mathematics, 64 verses of physics, 20 verses of climatology, 20 verses of geology, and so forth. The Book would have even anticipated the theory of relativity of Einstein! But it is not enough for the Qur'an to speak of the Earth or Space for it to be equivalent to geological or astronomical theory. Quite the contrary, verses of this type convey visions of the world proper to archaic societies, visions which have lost all validity, following the discoveries of modern science.

For al-Azm, to transpose the problem of God out of the rules of rational argumentation is to open the way to total irrationality, because nothing would then be opposed to practicing the same transposition in favor of all superstitions. There is no way for the reasonable man to accept the profound changes of the modern world and the new philosophical vision of things that flows from it. Dialectical materialism (Marxism) is the philosophy of modern man. It is to be distinguished from mechanical materialism derived from Newtonian physics. Unfortunately, al-Azm does not

consider the problems inherent in Marxist philosophy, the Soviet gulag or the horrors of the Maoist cultural revolution!

He denies himself wanting to denigrate religious sentiment: he simply calls it to be distinguished from religion. According to him, the religious tradition is apt to be "resumed" in a modern perspective. And to join the act with the word, al-Azm wrote an interesting essay on *The Drama of Iblis*, proposing a modern reading and a "precursor" model of what the intellectual should do of the religious tradition. It is in this sense that al-Azm is distinguished from dogmatic Marxism, which often opposes Islamism by a no less obscurantist discourse. One must read al-Azm's essay to appreciate the difference!

In this essay, the author proposes to treat the theme of Iblis (name given to the great Satan in the Qur'an) not as an object of dogma but as a subject of mythology. He invites Muslims to read the Qur'anic verses that speak of Iblis as one reads Shakespeare insisting that Hamlet killed his father, meaning reading it as a fiction. The God of monotheism does not allow the emergence of the genre of tragedy, because it always ends up intervening, if not in the hereafter, to restore justice or exercise clemency. The legend of Iblis should end with a happy ending, like all other biblical and Qur'anic stories. Iblis will be saved, but for the sake of intrigue, this secret has not been revealed by the God-author of the myth! Therefore, believers must stop blaming Iblis and charge him with all their misdeeds. Far from being the representative of evil, Iblis is the most authentic believer, because he has gone to the end of his fidelity to God by refusing to prostrate himself before Adam (according to the Islamic version); he incarnated the purest monotheism by refusing to execute a divine order which leads to "associationism" (*shirk*); he was a true hero, refusing to ask forgiveness for not dishonoring himself, while the miserable Adam has forgiven many outrages and has accepted the most degrading situations to escape the divine curse. This literary reading of a religious theme provoked a harsh reaction from conservatives, who shouted scandal and demanded the author's indictment. However, this reading is similar to that of a Muslim Sufi of the medieval age!

Radical criticism, often of Marxist inspiration, has allowed many debates and controversies on topics that were previously considered taboo. It highlighted the inability of men of religion to participate in high-level intellectual discussions, and their natural inclination to launch anathemas. Radical criticism, often of Marxist inspiration, has allowed many debates and controversies on topics that were previously considered taboo. It highlighted the inability of men of religion to participate in high-level intellectual discussions, and their propensity easier to launch only anathemas. It has encouraged more moderate Muslims to look for their answers and arguments in modern philosophy. The Sadiqs Jalal al-Azm, Husayn Mruwwa, Tayyib Tizini, or Mahdi Mil have certainly not given satisfactory answers to the question of the relation of religion to modernity, far from it. However, they exerted a real pressure for this problem to be debated with a minimum of freedom, out of sacred taboos and beaten paths.

5.7 The Comprehensive History

Could a historical science whose field would be expanded to accommodate all the achievements of the social sciences and the interpellation of modern reason serve to build a modern Islamic thought and take over the tradition, without falling in the trap of scientific orientalism?

Hisham Ja'it (Hichem Djaït) used the following solution. According to him, the best way to emancipate modern Muslims from the weight of their tradition is simply to subject them to historicity. However, there is history and history. Throughout his long and successful academic career, Djaït has fought fiercely against three kinds of pseudo-histories or ideologized stories. The first is the "Orientalist history," which consists in crumbling Islam, the religion as well as the civilization, into a collection of loans gathered without originality: the message transmitted by Muhammad would be a degrading combination of Jewish and Christian elements; Muslim urbanism a failed assembly of Hellenic and Persian influences; Muslim legislation an exploded composite of customary and Roman law; philosophy and mysticism a hybrid assembly of pre-Islamic elements; etc. Djaït's antipathy towards Orientalism is very profound, sometimes even exaggerated. He does not think, however, that Orientalism is the only rational knowledge available to us for Muslim history. In his books, he rarely discussed the theses and works done by Muslim authors: it is in dialogue with Orientalism that he built his great historical works, like his monograph on Kufa, the first city built in Islam, his study of *fitna*, the first religious war between Muslims, or the audacious biography of Muhammad whose publication he has just begun. He claims, in all his writings, a comprehensive method which, contrary to Orientalism, does not make the subject lose its strange complexity and its own logic.

The second is "traditional history," which consists of taking the data from ancient Muslim historiography after having purged them of everything that opposes the idealized image of Islam in its past. Djaït opposes philological science in the pure Western tradition. For him, philology is a universal science that applies to all kinds of historical documents, so a separate treatment for the history of Islam is impossible. There is always the specific history and the identity image that a society bears on itself, so it is then necessary to know on which register one is located.

Even if it is less explicit when it comes to the third form, that of "ideologized history," the savvy readers quickly grasp the apostrophes he often launches against the neo-reformists and some modernists, because they would sacrifice history, in its precise and technical sense, out of desire – although for noble reasons – to push Muslims to modernize. Bad compromise, would say Djaït. History is not intended to judge the past or to reform the present, it must objectively restate the facts: it is for contemporaries to discuss, in the light of objectively established facts, their present situation and their future project, but that will already leads them away from the strictly scientific dimension of this discipline. However, as previously shown, classical Reformism and neo-Reformism often rely on history to justify propositions concerning the present. For example, to justify the abolition of the slave trade or the

practice of polygamy in contemporary societies, Reformers have always tried to show that Islam had emerged in a society with brutal slavery and polygamy: to not push these societies to chaos, Islam would have chosen not to completely abolish these two practices, but to reduce them gradually. Thus, polygamy was limited to four women and slavery allowed only in case of war. This would justify, from a reformist point of view, the decision to abolish these practices in present times: in this way, such a decision, far from appearing as an obstacle to the Divine Law, would be the fulfillment of its deepest destiny.

However, according to Djaït, history is not determined by the wishes of Heaven, but rather by the dynamics of the facts. This shows that if the Arab before Islam actually had the right to marry an unlimited number of women and if equality were one of the principles proclaimed by Islam, it is nonetheless true that the monogamy was a pre-Islamic practice known and respected in many families (Muhammad himself was monogamous before the Revelation!). Slavery has no doubt been limited to war, but far from reducing the number of slaves, the dynamics of history have decided otherwise. In fact, Islam has unleashed such a cycle of conquests, as vast as it is intense, that slavery, instead of remaining a minor phenomenon, has had an extension that was unthinkable in the small tribal wars of the pre-Islamic period.

Djaït raises concern when he used the same kind of argument about the relationship between Islam and the state. Neo-Reformists and modernists were, he argues, largely influenced by Muslim-Christian dialogue; they transpose into Islam the thesis of a first phase of religion that would have been purely spiritual, before being later altered by political ambitions under the guise of religion. The reform of Islam would, according to them, be based on the Christian model and consist of a return to the origins of Islam, an apolitical Islam devoid of any idea of state. For Djaït, this is unsustainable. "In fact, the religious and the political are intertwined [in the Islam of the origins]. It is normal that a nation founded on a religious preaching at the beginning, on a prophetic metahistory, on a sacred book, refers first to the religion. Everything seems religious to it, including and especially the political."[12] Certainly, we can criticize, in some works of Djaït, the rather abusive use of the terms "State" and "Islamic Nation." However, Neo-reformists and some Modernists do not explain how one would be allowed to speak of a spiritual and apolitical Islam that would have been disguised after the death of his Prophet when it was Muhammad himself who resorted to war, the latter having been the main factor of the stateization of Islam. Is it then enough to fall back on the defensive war thesis? The historian does not have to hide his face, and it is necessary to have Djaït's courage to say it clearly: it is with the battle of Badr (624) "that the original pact of defense took the place of the warrior state and official booty."[13] The battle of Badr did not take place after the disappearance of the Prophet, but at the very beginning of the Medinan phase of Islam.

[12] *The Great Discord: Religion and Politics in the Islam of Origins*, Gallimard, 1989, p. 11.

[13] *Idem*, p. 39.

Does history not help us with issues of Islamic reformism and the modernization of Muslim societies? Obviously, but in a different way than the Reformers, the Neo-reformists and some of the modernists think. While the historical writings of Djaït, being of great caliber, are known to all, much of his general complex and subtle work remains obscure to many readers. History, for Djaït, is not a tool that is useful for reforming or modernizing since it cannot determine the purposes of God or the future of men. However, it teaches the essential, namely that since the appearance of humankind there have been three historical revolutions: firstly the appearance of Homo sapiens – the man of the hunt – secondly the Neolithic age and the advent of the farmer, and thirdly the revolution of the "inventor and discoverer" since the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Muslims are inevitably involved in this third revolution: the only question is whether they will be able to reach this third age of humanity while controlling their own destiny or whether they will enter it by force, alienated, passive and humiliated. It is at this stage that the intellectual, better informed by history and all scientific knowledge, can play an important role. In his own perception of the role of the committed intellectual historian, Djaït went through two phases, one very optimistic and the other much less so. He recorded most of his first attitude in a book called *The Personality and the Arab-Islamic Becoming*.[14] Without false modesty, he proclaims, like Saint Augustine, Ibn Khaldun and Khayr al-Din, the Maghrebian historian who announces the end of a cycle of history and explains the coming dynamics. In fact, this book is a kind of general program which is in part devoted to the religious reform of Islam.

Djaït calls for a deep movement of reform, guided by a large-scale scientific research. He declares, from the outset, that neither traditionalism nor Westernization nor Marxism are adequate ways for this, for the three are closed ideologies unsuited for the current situation of Arab-Muslim societies. He calls for a secularism that does not ignore the religious element and a religiosity that does not refuse secularism. He insists in particular on the need to respect Islam which is one of the great spiritual and historical traditions of humanity. He goes so far as to suspect that some modernists want to destroy Islam under the guise of reforming it. Inspired by Iqbal, he proposes a kind of pact in which the State would continue to proclaim itself Islamic while accepting to be in conformity with modernity. Rather than oppose modernity, Muslims are exhorted to adhere to it in a dynamic spirit that entails the desire to enrich it with their own historical experience. For example, Muslims would be entitled to highlight their tradition of law, but should retain only humanistic principles – the old provisions such as corporal punishment and discrimination against women are to be declared obsolete. Moreover, it is not only the law that should be emancipated from religion, but also public morality, so that more room is given to individual conscience. It is therefore necessary to go beyond the mythical and irrational aspects adopted by Islam with a new philosophical vision of its history and

[14] Published in French at *Editions du Seuil*, in 1974, then in Arabic at Dar al-Tali'a, 1984.

destiny. We must remember that Djaït made these proposals in the 1960s, before the developments of Islamism and the crisis of the post-colonial state.

It is needless to say here that Djaït's ideas had very little impact, despite his celebrity status as a historian. In addition, he paid the price of his ideological non-alignment in the era of ideologies as already explained (and sometimes in the immediate sense, since his academic career was brutally and arbitrarily stopped when he turned 60). His other book, *The Crisis of Islamic Culture*, published nearly a quarter of a century after the previous one, turns out to be more pessimistic.[15] Djaït admits there is no way out of the crisis of Islam. Nevertheless, he continues to hammer his first convictions: the advance of modernity is inevitable and Muslims condemn themselves to marginalization if they oppose its progress; religion in general and Islam in particular are worthy of profound respect, but science and secularism do not have to seek their foundations in the Qur'an or in tradition. He insists especially on the fact that modernity, in itself, is not in contradiction with religion, but that it establishes the reign of freedom of conscience and the autonomy of knowledge and politics, which shrinks the field of religion; it also shows little interest in metaphysics and spirituality. The spiritual values of Islam could adapt to modernity, but not historical Islam that belongs to a bygone age of humanity. According to Djaït, historical research, and more generally the free exercise of thought and intellectual debate could have helped to introduce the spirit of modernity into Muslim societies. But, this has been made impossible due to the absence of democracy, cultural indigence, limited resources for academic research, the state's oppression of civil society and its allegiance to the state, etc.

Djaït finally seems to radicalize some of his positions. He deplores the fact that Muslim culture is more oriented towards conflict of ideas and the search for martyrdom than towards the pursuit of prosperity. He is skeptical about the possibility of democratization of Islamic societies, if only in the near future. Democracy, which is the new religion of humanity, can acclimatize into a society only when its members believe in it as much as they believed in their ancient religions, which is not the case in the Muslim world. And besides, according to him, what remains of these old religions? Not much, he tells us, except anthropological survivals. The fact is that current Islamist movements do not represent a religious or spiritual phenomenon, but only identity and protest reactions to a modernity that Muslims can neither escape nor accommodate to.

It will be necessary to see, in the coming years, Muslims' reception to Muhammad's biography that Djaït is publishing in three successive parts. This reception will reveal the influence that a comprehensive, open, and critical story could have on a collective vision firmly rooted in its tradition for centuries.

[15] *Azmat al-thaqafa al-Islamiyya*, Beirut, Dar al-Tali'a, 2000.

5.8 New Islamology

Can we hope then to build a rational knowledge that conforms to the methodological requirements of the human and social sciences around Islam? The term "Islamology" has been proposed to collect all the production that goes in this direction. French researchers, who had an important presence in North Africa, preferred this term over that that of Orientalism since North Africa is not, strictly speaking, part of the East. However, Orientalism and Islamology have almost identical meanings. The knowledge of Islam that has been produced and published in the West reflects on one hand the progress made by scientific research, and on the other the West's vision of other cultures. This knowledge is heteroclite: it includes a production accumulated since the beginning of the Renaissance, or even the end of the Middle Ages, when personal initiatives relayed later by the Christian orders had tried to represent Islam as a religion and a civilization, in a more or less objective way. The development of philology has elevated research on Islam to a status of rigor. The Dominicans and then the Franciscans and the Jesuits, later American Protestant missionaries, all contributed to the elaboration of a discourse on Islam which was methodologically objective, but which also had as its background the missionary vocation of its producers. At the time of colonization, finally, this vocation was often mixed with the desire to better analyze local cultures to improve the administration of the colonies. The consolidation of the social sciences and humanities subsequently gave a new direction to this knowledge without, however, making a radical break with its ambiguous past. Finally, it must be added that Orientalism has too often been overwhelmed by all the evils of the time of national struggles and new independence.

However, not all Orientalists or Islamologists have had a missionary attitude or participated (actively or passively) in the colonial enterprise. Many have contributed to a better understanding of Islam in Western societies. We can then go back far enough to cite pioneers like Antoine Galland (1646–1715) who, through his translation of the *Arabian Nights*, gave birth to a certain fascination for the East. The nineteenth century and the first half of the 20th were the great period of scientific Orientalism or classical Islamology, with Reinhard Dozy (1820–1883) and Adam Metz (1869–1917) in the field of the history of civilization; Ernest Renan (1832–1892), Léon Gauthier (1862–1949), Max Horton (1874–1945) and Miguel Palacios (1871–1944) in Islamic philosophy; Louis Massignon (1883–1962), Reynold Nicholson (1868–1945) and Henry Corbin (1903–1978) in Muslim mysticism; Michael de Goeje (1863–1909) and Krachovsky (1883–1951) in history and geography; Max Mayerhof (1874–1945) and Kraus (1904–1944) in experimental sciences; Eduard Brown (1862–1926), Carlo Nallino (1872–1938) and Carl Brockelman (1868–1956) in literature; Theodor Noldeke (1836–1931) in Qur'anic history, etc. Still, we have mentioned here only a few names among many others.

In more recent years, we can mention Régis Blachère (1900–1973), Hamilton Gibb (1895–1971), Joseph Schacht (1902–1969), Marshall Hudgson (1922–1968), Jacques Berque (1910–1995), Charles Pellat (1914–1970) -1992), and Maxime

Rodinson (1915–2004), whose contributions have been fundamental in advancing studies on Islam and the Muslim world. Should we classify them in the category of Islamology or that of social sciences? The question becomes more pressing if one thinks of the works of Claude Cahen (1909–1991) on the history of medieval Islam or those of Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) on the sociology of Algeria. However, in the Muslim world, and especially since the era of independence, all of this so-called Orientalist knowledge has often been rejected in its entirety, the Muslim academic research at times giving itself the task of totally refuting it and revealing its deep attachment to the colonial enterprise. Edward Said's famous essay, *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient* (1978), defending a rather complex thesis, served to condone this widespread suspicion of any Western discourse on Islam.

While it is not wrong to say that part of this Orientalist discourse carries a politically charged past and focuses on certain aspects of the Western imaginary of Islam, it is nonetheless true that, under the guise of denying Orientalism, many Muslims refuse to take part in any rational discourse and historical criticism of their religion and history. Any Muslim researcher in human and social sciences who ventures into these forbidden areas is immediately accused of connivance with Orientalism and the results of his or her research immediately fall under suspicion or are even dismissed. The quarrel of Orientalism is then coupled with a profound refusal to apply the principles of modern science to the case of Islam. The situation was aggravated by the fact that colonial guilt, internalized in the West since the second half of the twentieth century, marginalized research on Islam and relegated it to the departments of foreign languages and civilizations in universities – the idea was to show respect for formerly colonized societies by letting them struggle with their own cultures. Thus, a long, rich and solid tradition of scientific inquiry seems to have died out in a general indifference.

It is by considering the complexity of this global situation that Mohamed Arkoun, professor of Islamic thought in the prestigious Sorbonne University, proposed in 1976[16] to found an "applied Islamology." He admits that classical Islamology was a Western discourse on Islam and thus accuses it of having bowed to the Cartesian model according to which "knowing is foreseeing in order to gain ability." He regrets that it behaved like the impassive guide of a museum, in the sense that it kept to the study of Islam through the authorities requested by Muslims. It therefore neglected the oral expressions of Islam and its written expressions and non-linguistic semiotic systems were deemed unrepresentative. The consequences of this marginalization were, moreover, aggravated by the secondary position of Islamology in the Western sciences which was relegated to the departments of ancient languages. As a result, the application of new methods to the case of Islam has remained very limited.

This new Islamology is assigned to correct this situation by assuming both the complexity of the Islamic case and the progress of modern research: the Islamologist

[16] "For an Applied Islamology", text reprinted in *For a Critique of Islamic Reason*, Maisonneuve and Larose, 1984.

would not only become a man of science but also a leader in search of renewal. In a multidisciplinary perspective, according to his project, Islamology would study Islam with the goal of contributing to the modern study of religion in general. The plurality of methods is indeed essential to Arkoun's project since it avoids the reductive divisions of the phenomena studied.

As we can see, Arkoun shifts the problem to the methodological field. It must be remembered that when he was developing his project, the human and social sciences were in a methodological boiling point. Arkoun therefore wanted to place the line of demarcation not between Muslims and non-Muslims, but between those who remain followers of traditional methods and those who, both Muslim and Western, agree to apply the new methods in scientific investigation. His ultimate goal is to create the conditions for the exercise of an Islamic thought freed from old taboos, obsolete mythologies, and alienations exercised by modern ideologies. In this vast enterprise, there would be room for everyone.

Arkoun thus intends to free himself from the imperialism of philology and opens the Islamic corpus to the new interrogations engendered by structuralist linguistics and semiotics, by the reshaped anthropology of Claude Lévy Strauss and Roger Bastide, by the new methods in history advocated by the Ecole des Annales, the post-colonialist sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, etc. He was thus noted for his innovative study of the problem of Arab humanism in the case of Miskawayh and for an ambitious project of a modern reading of the Qur'an.[17] In both cases, Arkoun was inspired by structuralism to overcome an old cleavage between western science and Islamic knowledge. He therefore refused to judge the works of classical Islam according to Western models and canons. A Miskawayh cannot be mistaken for a simple anthologist, nor the Qur'an for a collection of disparate and disordered loans of biblical legends. Relying on the new "theories of the text" developed in the wake of modern linguistics and semiotics, Arkoun strove to show in each object studied its own logic and structure and to reveal, behind every apparent disorder, the deep semiotic order being hidden, each text being a specific creation and having a specific dynamic.

According to Arkoun, two major ruptures are to be rethought: the rupture of orthodox Islamic thought with philosophical attitude and the rupture of modern thought with religious thought. The first has given primacy to theological-legal reason, and the second has made unthinkable the myth, the symbol, the metaphor, and all that plays a decisive role in the expression of the "religious." In his opinion, it would be necessary to demystify and demythologize the history of Islam and at the same time consider the need to restore the psycho-social and cultural functions of religious language. He therefore refuses positivism in the manner of someone like Bultmann and is skeptical of the postulate of the inevitable decline of religion, as was advocated by Marx, Comte, or Durkheim.

[17] *Contribution to the study of Arab humanism in the 4th/10th century: Miskawayh philosopher and historian*, Vrin, 1970, and *Readings of the Qur'an*, Maisonneuve and Larose, 1982.

This critical revival of tradition and modernity leads Arkoun to introduce two fundamental distinctions. He distinguishes, in Islam, two phases: a dynamic phase, roughly between 660–1300, and the other dominated by the theological-legal reason and characterized by a deficient rational thought. He distinguishes, in modernity, two successive ages: the classical age (1492–1945), and the post-modern age, which he prefers to call "the age of emergent reason." In his eyes, the Islam-West opposition is nothing more than the resurgence of a cleavage established in the Medieval Age by the theologies which were all Jewish, Christian, and Muslim -- systems of mutual exclusion. Arkoun's vow is to introduce what he calls the "Islamic fact" into the political, economic and cultural history of the "Semitic-Mediterranean" space. The case of Islam will then take a central place in contemporary scientific research and modern reflection on mankind. As a corollary of this vow, Islam sees itself as one of the components of human "religious reason" because Arkoun intends to distinguish between the theological reason which is a rationalizing cultural system and religious reason which is an open set of potential coherences, based on archetypal cases common to all human reason. The end of the religious age is not accomplished with ideological or revolutionary violence, but rather by the slow critical work exerted towards a production which spreads over centuries and which ends up confusing religious sentiment with hard core theological representations that monopolize the meaning of truth and the claim to truth.

Such is the ambitious project that Arkoun has worked tirelessly on and preached for over 40 years. It is impossible to summarize here in a few pages his contributions and his themes. Even though reception to his project remains well below the celebrity he has enjoyed, he has succeeded in introducing new methods of investigation to Muslim universities and his works have been translated and popularized throughout the Muslim world. His critics accuse him of pursuing a Westernizing speech on Islam and of shifting between tradition and modernity: they question the relevance of his Islamology and wonder whether the study of Islam in Muslim societies should not simply be the responsibility of the departments of philosophy and the human sciences. Doesn't the proposal an Islamology or a sinology still fall under a Western vision which claims to be superior? The biggest criticism directed at Arkoun, not without reason this time, is that he had sketched projects without proposing academic studies on the topics he evokes: he did not engage his fame to found a department of studies or a research center that would give real visibility to his project of "Applied Islamology." However, having chosen to work off the beaten path, Arkoun was also the victim of many misunderstandings. The fact that he kept strictly away from the three ideologies that were competing for the Muslim world in his day (Marxism, nationalism, and Islamism) offered him little stable reception. In fact, it was above all an "interchange" between three areas hitherto hermetically closed to each other: Islamology, the postmodern human and social sciences, and the religious thought of Islam. Arkoun realized a real opening between these three areas of thought and pushed them to a dialogue full of hope. No university in the Muslim world has a department of Islamology, but the neologism *islamiyyat* (to describe Islamology) is widely used today. His thinking has undeniably exerted a profound influence in the West as well as in the Muslim world.

If Western Orientalism and Classical Islamology were the victims of the new fervor and enthusiasm unleashed at the time of decolonization, "the new Islamology" may be today the victim of the hunt for relativism in the West and the decline of research in Muslim societies. We must hope, however, that the shocking challenges of so-called "Islamic" terrorism since 2001 are finally not only pushing Muslims to revisit their own vision of their history and spirituality, but also pushing Westerners to acquire more and more scientific and critical of Islam as religion and civilization.

References

Benzine, Rachid. 2004. *The New Thinkers of Islam*. Albin Michel.
Filali Ansari, Abdou. 2003. *Reform the Islam? An Introduction to Contemporary Debates*. The Discovery.

Chapter 6
Epilogue: What Reforms for Today?

Abstract The term "Conclusion" would be inappropriate for this set of reflections relating to Islamic Reformism. However, two strong ideas deserve to be highlighted at the end of a critical history of the "Reformation" in Islam as these pages have tried to sketch (We have deliberately limited our investigation to the Sunni Muslim world, because Shi'ism, another great tradition of Islam, has important peculiarities that call for separate analysis).

First, the dominant image of Islamic fundamentalism as a continuation of tradition, as the original and incarnate message of Islam from Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab to Hassan al-Banna, or as the awakening of the Muslim nation, is an unfounded picture from the point of view of an archeology of modern Islamic thought. It is simply a belated projection to give historical and political legitimacy to more generally Muslim fundamentalism and more particularly to a "re-shaped" Islamism that emerged in the 1980s and that is advancing today in the Muslim World and in Muslim circles in the West by proposing it as a protective bulwark against a more radical current known as jihadism.

Keywords New international order · Re-enchantment of the world · Globalization · Emergencies · Comparative religions · Interreligious dialogue · Re-spiritualizing Islam · De-wahhabizing Islam · *Semper Reformanda*

The term "Conclusion" would be inappropriate for this set of reflections relating to Islamic Reformism. However, two strong ideas deserve to be highlighted at the end of a critical history of the "Reformation" in Islam as these pages have tried to sketch.[1]

First, the dominant image of Islamic fundamentalism as a continuation of tradition, as the original and incarnate message of Islam from Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab to Hassan al-Banna, or as the awakening of the Muslim nation, is an unfounded picture from the point of view of an archeology of modern Islamic thought. It is simply a belated projection to give historical and political legitimacy

[1] We have deliberately limited our investigation to the Sunni Muslim world, because Shi'ism, another great tradition of Islam, has important peculiarities that call for separate analysis.

M. Haddad, *Muslim Reformism - A Critical History*, Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations 11, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36774-9_6

to more generally Muslim fundamentalism and more particularly to a "re-shaped" Islamism that emerged in the 1980s and that is advancing today in the Muslim World and in Muslim circles in the West by proposing it as a protective bulwark against a more radical current known as *jihadism*. But fundamentalism was not only a break with the process of modernization of Muslim societies defended in its time by pioneers like Khayr al-Dan in Tunisia and al-Tahtawi in Egypt. Above all, it broke with a reform movement, inaugurated within the Muslim tradition, whose fatherhood belongs to the Emir Abdelkader in the Maghrib and to Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in the Mashriq. Both were disciples of the mystic Ibn Arabi, had little sympathy for the decadent legalism of *taqlid*, and knew almost nothing of Ibn Taymiyya and his rigid and proto-fundamentalist thinking. As we have seen, Muhammad Abduh, having been fortunate enough to become *mufti*, played an important role in popularizing the principles of this movement. But the figures of this movement can be counted in dozens, and they manifest themselves in the course of three generations: Allal al-Fassi, Ibn Babis, Abdelaziz Thaalbi, al-Tahir and al-Fadhil ibn Ashur, Tahir al-Haddad, Qasim Amin, Mustafa Maraghi, Mustafa Abd al-Raziq, Mahmud Abu Rayya, Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah, etc.

Secondly, the image of an Islam synonymous with inertia, frozen in its past and hermetically closed to all new thought, is an exaggerated image. There is another Islam that has had, for a century and a half, thinkers, propagandists, and martyrs. It is the repository of an old humanist tradition conveyed by *falsafa* and mysticism as well as meditative poetry. At the same time, it bears witness to an opening to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and to the principles of modern times. To ask oneself which of the two Islams is the one that is most representative is a false question. It must be considered that, under the pressure of globalization and the social effects of technological modernization, Muslim societies are becoming secularized willy-nilly. Is it necessary to recall here that processes of "reformation" in all religious traditions are long and painful processes? The Judeo-Christian tradition in the West has reached its current situation only through the Trial of Galilee, the blacklisting of great thinkers like Spinoza, Locke, Montesquieu, and Voltaire, the Wars of Religion, the Syllabus of 1864, etc. The contemporary exception is more the religious situation in the West than Islam. The fact is that in the rest of the world, conservative or fundamentalist manifestations of religion are legion. Isn't the West, in turn, today threatened by what Gilles Kepel called "the revenge of God"?

It is fair to consider, however, that the situation of Islam currently lends itself more to fear than to hope. No one can make an archeology of the past serve as veil of modesty that masks the seriousness of the present situation. But it is always wrong to oversimplify situations that are complex. The current debates on the future of Islam are reminiscent in some respects of a famous controversy that took place more than a century ago. In 1883, Jamal al-Din Saïd al-Afghani was in Paris with a handful of Egyptian disciples who were forced into exile. It was then that Ernest Renan, the famous philologist and essayist, was invited to give a public lecture at the University of the Sorbonne which dealt with Islam. The text of his lecture was entirely published by a Parisian newspaper and al-Afghani and his disciples decided to offer a response. Renan had developed, a few years earlier, a theory asserting the

fundamental incapacity of the Semitic "race" to produce science and civilization, and his verdict had been without appeal: "The essential condition for the spread of European civilization is the destruction of Semitisms *par excellence*, the destruction of the theocratic power of Islamism, and consequently the destruction of Islamism […] This is the eternal war, the war that will not cease until the last son of Ishmael has died of misery or has been relegated by terror to the depths of the desert."[2] In his lecture, he had once again hammered out the same conviction: "Islamism has only been harmful for human reason."[3] He failed to mention the efforts made for the modernization of Muslim societies or any of the reforming heads of state or Muslim modernists whose work has already been presented. The only exception was Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, popularizer of French thought in the Arab world and author of the famous travel book entitled *Takhlis al-Ibriz* (L'Or de Paris); as Renan stated: "What distinguishes the Muslim is the hatred of science […] One of the most curious testimonies in this respect is that of the Shaykh Rifa'a, who had resided for several years in Paris as chaplain to the Egyptian School, and who, after returning to Egypt, wrote a book full of the most curious observations on French society. His main idea is that European science, especially by its principle of the permanence of the laws of nature, is a complete heresy."[4] This is proof of the great misunderstanding then reigning over the Muslim world among the very people who were supposed to be its specialists!

Al-Afghani's answer surprised many people, especially his disciples. He bluntly admitted with courage that fanaticism was the disease of Islam and that a too strict attachment to religion had had a negative impact on certain aspects of intellectual life. However, he refused any "essentialist" attitude, since, according to him, Islam

---

[2] *On the part of the Semitic peoples in the history of civilization* (1862), Complete Works of Ernest Renan, t. II, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1948, pp. 332–333. "Islamism and science," in *Complete works*, t. I, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1947, p. 957. By Islamism, the author meant the Muslim religion.

[3] Idem, pp. 957–958.

[4] September 11, 2001 seems to represent today a pivotal date. A large section of the intelligentsia seems to have swapped scholarship and long-term vision for the role of "watchdog," according to Paul Nizan's formula. The so-called "Clash of Civilizations" theory is now enjoying great success, both in the West and in the Muslim world: it seems that two worlds that had coexisted in pain for centuries now want to make a final cut. Islamophobia is no longer, in the West, the prerogative of the extreme right-wing or the primary anti-Western of fundamentalist Muslim circles. The latter often take the pretext of simple facts (a sentence in a conference, a caricature published in a newspaper, etc.) to ignite and to convince them of a new crusade against Islam. It must be admitted that they find more and more echoes among Muslims, even the most moderate ones. More than ever, an Islam-refuge and identity prevails and threatens, in Muslim societies, the fragile advances that were made in favor of reforms. In the West, Renan's lecture was put back into circulation, ignoring its context, as if the opposition to Islam allowed for a return to macabre racial theories (we say it without complexes, since the entirety of this lecture and al-Afghani's reply have been translated into Arabic by us). Islamophobic blasts have been sold to more than a million copies. Under the pen of scholars and research directors, we can now read titles as boorish as: "The long war of Islam and Christianity: 622–2007." And this, not to mention the development, in recent years, of a "charlatan Islamology" that confirms the defeat of scientific thought and the leveling of publications on Islam; a "specialization in Islam" often becomes the shortest route to profitable nonsense and media celebrity.

was not condemned to remain in the state described by Renan: "If it is true that the Muslim religion is an obstacle to development science, can we say that this obstacle will not disappear one day? In what way does the Muslim religion differ from other religions on this point? All religions are intolerant, each in their own way."[5]

The exchange and the meeting between the philosopher of the Third Anti-clerical and colonialist Republic and the leader of the nascent Muslim pan-Islamism has not been without effect on the future of relations between Islam and the West. A better understanding then took hold and the generations that followed made great efforts for a better mutual understanding. As an example, the Shaykh Mustafa Abd al-Raziq, who was taught at the Sorbonne the theories of Ernest Renan and Victor Cousin who were not very sympathetic to Islam, returned to Egypt full of admiration for the new knowledge that was developing in the West. On the other hand, Orientalists have renewed and transformed the Western gaze on Islam and the Muslim world, thus making a more humane and generous point of view towards one and the other. Let us remember, in this respect, Leon Gauthier, Louis Massignon, Henry Corbin, Max Mayerhof, Carlo Nellino, Carl Brockelman, Regis Blachere, Jacques Berque, Maxime Rodinson, and many others.

For over a century, these scholars have played the role of cultural mediators. Despite the serious crises caused by decolonization, this intellectual posture has never disarmed. The Reformers, for their part, very affected by the injustices that their societies had undergone, did not confuse the denunciation of unjust policies with that of scientific modernity. Opposition to the West was then expressed within the West itself, invoking, for example, human rights or the rights of peoples to self-determination as inalienable. The most radical even borrowed Marxist ideology to denounce "capitalist alienation" or "colonialist imperialism." During the Algerian War, there was more interest in the *maquis* in the positions of Jean-Paul Sartre than in the precepts of *jihad* in the Qur'an.

Islam, yesterday assimilated to fanaticism and today to terrorism, seems to be now a destabilizing factor on a very large scale. Should we banish nations with more than a billion people? Because, as rightly stated by al-Afghani, it is not a matter of pleading the cause of the Muslim religion, but of hundreds of millions of men and women who intend to remain Muslims while claiming the right to live in the modern world and to participate in its development. Moreover, have too many injustices and multiple short-term policies favored the emergence of situations that many are suffering today? Would it not be more lucid to help Islam to achieve its "reformation" and enter the modern without complex, endorsed the principles of the Enlightenment, as desired reformists of the nineteenth century?

[5] See al-Afghani's reply to Renan, published in the appendix in *Refutation of Materialists*, translation by A.-M. Goichon. Paris, Geuthner, 1942. Renan wrote a note on the answer, see *Complete Works*, vol. I, pp. 960–965. It reads in part: "The disagreement between the Liberals on these different points is not very profound, since, whether or not they are favorable to Islam, all come to the same practical conclusion: to spread education among the Muslims." We have translated into Arabic Renan's lecture and al-Afghani's answer with notes on the circumstances of this controversy (*Qawadid al-Tanwir*, supra, at note 1).

The author of these reflections thinks that it is wiser to pose the problem of Islam with the least possible passion, by inserting it in a broader context which is characterized by the three phenomena of planetary scale: the new international order, the re-enchantment of the world, and widespread globalization.

6.1 The New International Order, the Re-enchantment of the World, and Widespread Globalization

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the end of the international order established at the famous Yalta Conference in 1945. The disappearance of the former communist bloc was then perceived as the triumph of freedom. But Muslim fundamentalists saw the event differently. For the latter, the Soviet Empire would never have succumbed without the war in Afghanistan and the heroism of the *mujahideen*. Those who, at the time, were referred to by many American officials and media organizations as "freedom fighters" were in fact the international Islamic fundamentalist who had made an appointment for *jihad* in Afghanistan. Was not Bin Laden himself one of the heroes of this war, a kind of Islamic Che Guevara, since he had given up the fortune of his social milieu to answer the call of the "Holy War"? If, for a liberal thinker like Fukuyama, the fall of communism is "the end of history," that is to say the definitive triumph of liberalism, it is for the fundamentalists the beginning of another story, that of a stage that aims to rid the planet of the second "Empire of Evil," that of the United States of America. To the ultra-liberal assertion of a story that ends with the final triumph of liberalism opposes the affirmation of a "finally awakened" Islam which reiterates the adventure of the initial Islam, which had swept away after its appearance in the seventh century the two great Empires of the time: the Sassanid Empire and the Byzantine Empire.

In addition, the long period of the "Cold War" had given rise to a huge military-financial machine that had to find a usage after the fall of communism. It should be noted that oil has always been an important factor in the relationship of "others" with Islam. The same Roosevelt who met Stalin and Churchill in Yalta in 1945 had forged a "holy alliance" between his country and Saudi Arabia during the first visit of an American president to the Gulf. The *jihad* in Afghanistan has also been financed by oil revenue. Thus, for the military-financial machine and the oil interests continue to produce their dividends (and large hidden commissions), the communist enemy had to be replaced by another. Islamic terrorism, which is an infamy, was then amplified to serve as an absolute danger, as it turns out to be among the potential enemies (China or Russia, for example) the weakest and most manipulable. Despite all the precautions that are taken to distinguish between terrorism on the one hand and Islam, Islamism, or even fundamentalism on the other, confusion cannot always be avoided – to the point that many innocent Muslims suffer the moral and material consequences of this confusion. Historians will one day say how many civilians have perished unjustly in the current global war on terror. Already,

we know that they number by hundreds of thousands of men, women and children in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

Is it necessary to recall here that Islamic terrorism first struck Muslim societies in the 1970s and 1980s, especially in Egypt and Algeria, without provoking all the international indignation that is manifested today? And has not the current war against terrorism mixed genres too often, creating rather dubious alliances and allowed scandalous human rights abuses? Such a situation hurts common Muslims and pushes them to further identity withdrawal. The work of self-criticism[6] that was inaugurated by reformism, then radicalized by the "new thinkers of Islam," to use a positivist formula by Rachid Benzine, thereby becomes a very difficult exercise. The temptation becomes great to resort to falsely rewarding representations, such as the role of defending the threatened community or the one that, on the contrary, lives the illusion of being able to eradicate Islam.

Religious puritanism and oil interests had brought Western Democrats and Muslim fundamentalists closer together during the "Cold War." We can see today which, out of puritanism and interest, eventually prevailed. A certain tension has been noticeable in the relationship between the emirs of oil and the powerful Wahhabi institution. Walid bin Talal, one of the first great fortunes in the world, is none other than the grandson of the founder of the Saudi Wahhabi Kingdom. Today he is the owner of the largest Arabic television channel producing and broadcasting the most daring videos and varieties. The influence of this channel on the adolescents of the Arab world is enormous and the starlets which they ensure the success compete with the greatest religious preachers. In addition, it is worth noting that all the petrodollar magnets keep their fortunes in Western banks. They were in a hurry, after the attacks of 2001, to have to choose their side. The fact is that Saudi Arabia is slowly moving away from the Wahhabi ideology, that the Muslim Brotherhood is forcefully disassociating itself from al-Qaeda and its bellicose ideology, and that an active albeit apolitical religiosity on the model of American evangelism progresses throughout the Arab world. Do we not see some governments adopt the latter as a bulwark for political Islam?

Everyone knows Max Weber's notion of "disenchantment with the world" to denote the retreat of religiosity in the modern world: he saw in this phenomenon an ineluctable tendency and no possibility of regression. But more recently, another sociologist, Peter Berger, has proposed the notion of "re-enchantment of the world" to describe what could be reversing this trend. Political scientists for their part have had the merit of warning their readers of the slow but solid "revenge of God" (to refer to Gilles Kepel's title) that is brewing all over the planet: would secularism today not be seriously surrounded by the rise of fundamentalisms, or by the return, quite simply, of the "religious"?

One could, without doubt, denounce the Eurocentric character of these appellations, since, in India or in the Muslim societies, religion had never truly disappeared

[6] *Al-Naqd al-dhati* (self-criticism) is the title of a well-known work by Allal al-Fasi, published in 1952.

to be able to talk about its return. In the United States, secularization has had a markedly different path from that in Europe, creating a kind of civil religion that has always been an essential component of the democratic social bond. To speak of disenchantment or re-enchantment of the world could also be meaningless in Buddhist societies, as in Japan. Nevertheless, the phenomenon does have a planetary character, because religion did not have among the elites and in the public spheres the weight it has today everywhere in the world.

Several studies confirm that this phenomenon spares no religion. It is not in question here to expand on the subject. But it must be pointed out that, while Islam is the most media-like case of this return of the "religious," it is far from being an isolated or exceptional case. Where there is this return there is inevitably a development of fundamentalisms and of religious violence, in Islam as elsewhere. The phenomenon itself is always in the long run, which is why one should engage in analyzes encompassing its many aspects and in long-term solutions projects.

One of the reasons why this phenomenon will last was stated by theorists like Max Weber, who thought that rationality would empower the spheres of human activity (political, economic, humanitarian, artistic or other) making religion lose its holistic and structuring character of society as a whole. However, what these theoreticians failed to see was that a new sphere would replace that of religion in this encompassing function: that of the economy, and more precisely that of the market. Today's market is the master of our destinies: it escapes collective ethics and parliamentary legislation because it is supposed to function according to its own laws which are as universal, "natural," and indisputable as those of old religions. The West, which represents 2% of humanity and concentrates alone half of the world's heritage alone, does not realize how much the World's poor perceive the market to be the heaviest to tyrannies. Thus, religion, even in its narrowest expressions, could be seen as the antidote to the tyranny of the market and its globalized policy which has no other concern than to defend it. This does not mean that religious fundamentalism (let alone terrorism) is the mere expression of social protest or that it is linked only to poverty. Nonetheless, the destabilization of societies by the effects of an unbridled globalized market favors the recourse to the religious, and to the identity more generally, as a means of protest and resistance.

Today's globalization is reminiscent of the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. Muslim societies will once again have to choose between two strategies: either to adapt to recent changes while trying to participate in the correction of their negative effects, or to fall back on themselves and live in the illusion of remaining out of reach of these mutations. It is important to encourage these societies to choose the first attitude. If they did not participate in globalization that is the fruit of the technological communication revolution, they nevertheless remember the significant human and religious interchange that followed the great expansion of Islam between the seventh and sixteenth centuries. Europeans of the Medieval Age could spend their lives without meeting a person of a different race or religion. On the other hand, there was little chance for a Muslim living in Baghdad or Istanbul to spend a week without having to deal with a Jew or a Christian. This memory of a religious and ethnic mixture was hidden during the wars of independence. We need

to regain our consciousness today and enhance its memory, not with the intention of destabilizing contemporary societies – because no democracy could function without a minimum of integration and centralization – but in order to establish an open and plural understanding of collective identity, which is the *sine qua non* for the democratization of Muslim societies.

Globalization weakens states and, consequently, the notion of citizenship based on that of collective identity. The notion of "citizen of the world" is a chimera, because it could be applied, strictly speaking, only to the big financiers, and possibly to some artists and intellectuals. However, ordinary people, unable to feel part of a world that exceeds them or of a society that now seems to escape them, will naturally tend to be members of a specific community and therefore to take refuge not in a riche and multi-faceted tradition, but rather in a hazy and tinkered memory of a more or less crushed pseudo-tradition. They will become the victims of choice for soft and invisible companies of domination. Hence arises the need to take charge of different religious traditions so that they serve to feed not a conflict of civilizations, but rather a conflict of manipulated memories. It should also be noted that, throughout history, whenever a group has acquired the means to go beyond the limits of its territory, its encounter with the others was first done in the violence.

It should also be noted that, throughout history, whenever human beings have acquired the means to go beyond the limits of their territory, their encounter with the other was first done in the violence. The current globalization will consequently bring its share of violence which will be nourished by the representations of reciprocal exclusions generated by manipulated memories. And everyone is to choose their side to be either the watchdog of an atomized and manipulated memory, or rather the depository of the collective memory of humanity – in other words, to justify the infamy of the other to go further into infamy, or to fight nobly through knowledge and dialogue for a universal culture.

6.2 Religion in Modernity

We must therefore take the idea of reforming religions more seriously and revisit our conception of an ineluctable progress that would relegate religions to mere survivals of the past. Religious identity is far from a false problem. It can only be positively constructed in a spirit of consensus and plurality. The problem with the governmental elites in the Muslim World is that they believed they could establish a national identity based on the prestige of individuals (i.e. leaders of independence movements) or of personal projects. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's modernism in Turkey, Bourguiba's liberalism in Tunisia, and Nasser's nationalism in Egypt were all very different, except in this regard. As a result, they did not take religious reform seriously; at best, it has been absorbed into the state bureaucracy. When the postcolonial state went into crisis, the "reformed' religion, which was reduced to a mere administration, paid for it. Atatürk, Nasser, and Bourguiba were led by the myth of unswerving progress that made the problem of religion devoid of interest: they were

the victims of the philosophies of their time. Themselves, in person, or the states they built, were soon caught up by a more complex reality. To remain faithful to the pioneering and visionary spirit of the founding fathers – which has only passing value – is one thing, but to repeat the same mistakes to repeat the misdeeds is another.

Modernism had made progress on its founding myth, as the old monotheisms had made the fall of Adam the foundation of sacred history. The idea of a linear and inevitable progress gives way today to a more modest ambition of improvement, both slow and difficult, of the life of the man and his civilization. This opens up new perspectives for religions that have set for themselves the spiritual and moral perfection of humanity, provided that they agree to make the effort to evade deceptive historical frameworks and to accept the demanding and promising condition of the modern Man. The desired modernity does not consist in contradicting or criticizing the religious sentiment, but in taking charge of the religious traditions and their riches by the means offered to us by the vastest experiences of human thought. If the notion of progress has been the ideological engine of modern times, it is clear that a certain frenzy of change has destroyed entire societies and has largely threatened the ecological balance of the planet. A generalized perfection, which would encompass all dimensions of the human being, should constitute today the new ambition of the globalized humanity; it is certainly a more modest ambition, compared to the utopias of the nineteenth century, but it is more respectful of differences and more welcoming to compromises between cultures.

This is not to question the Enlightenment, since Kant's motto, "Have the courage to use your own understanding," is more relevant than ever. However, today we know that disasters caused by savage capitalism, colonial policies, wars of mass destruction, and communist totalitarianism – not to speak of Nazism and the Holocaust – are the disasters of the post-Religious age and have nothing to envy the "West," in terms of sheer horror, the Crusades, the Inquisition and wars of religion. If Descartes, the father of modernity, said that reason is the best distributed good among men, it is also right, in view of the experience of modern times, to say that horror is the evil best shared between all the epochs of history. To deny this reality would be the perfect negation of the Enlightenment in the sense that such a spirit would thus testify to a lack of courage in the use of its understanding. If he had lived our time, Voltaire would have thought differently of his famous "crush the infamous."

Atheism is certainly a most respectable existential attitude, but it is by no means the *sine qua non* of modernity. Most Enlightenment philosophers believed in a Supreme Being and a universal ethic. It is enough to re-read the philosophical fable of *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan* by the Andalusian Muslim philosopher Ibn Tufayl (1185) to find the premises of such an attitude. Islam and the Enlightenment do not necessarily have to confront each other: on the contrary, Muslim reformism of the nineteenth century had worked in that direction and it is this "reformist spirit" that would be appropriate today to revive its ashes.

From its inception, Islam had incorporated certain principles which today are regarded as constituting a modern attitude. It took, for example, the atrocious wars of religion in Europe to finally admit the principle of religious plurality guaranteed

by the state. All Muslim dynasties, from the Umayyads to the Ottomans, have adopted and practiced this principle. Not only were atheism or "bookless" religions not clearly tolerated and accepted, but let us also remember Locke's work, author of the most famous treatise on tolerance, which excluded from the sphere of the toleration atheists and… Catholics! Need I cite another example? It is generally accepted that the Protestant Reformation favored modernity by introducing the notion that man lives under a spectacle, meaning that the doctrine of predestination, espoused by Calvin in particular, encouraged believers to fulfill the best of their earthly calling in the hope that God gives them the guarantee of their salvation. However, the valorization of the work and the quest for "terrestrial" happiness have been conveyed by Islam from its origins. And if we must add a third example, we can speak of the individualization of religious consciousness, which is a fundamental component of the modern spirit. Even though Islam has finally become institutionalized, like all religions, there still retains in the Qur'an the ideal of a personal and intimate relationship between the believer and his God. The words "secularism" and "secularization" are, as Marcel Gauchet reminds us, of ecclesiastical origin. From a certain point of view, Islam is a secular religion since it adopts one of the simplest forms of monasticism considered as a "universal model of inner unity" to use Raimon Panikkar's original definition. These are, it seems, examples among others that should be revalued to allow a better understanding between Islam and the modern world.

The American historian Marshall G. S. Hodgson explained the reluctance of Islam to enter modern civilization by the relevance of its answers to the great problems of the ancient and Medieval Age; according to him, the needs of the past have been so well met that it has not felt the need to go beyond this past and to break with it. This may explain, it seems, why it is difficult for Islam to welcome and accept a "pure and hard" secularism, but it could well accommodate itself to a "light secularism," to copy a happy expression of Jean Bauberot, a sociologist of secularism. We have already referred to Mohamed Charfi's position, renowned jurist and left-wing intellectual: in the Sunni Muslim world, the state cannot completely evade its religious obligations. Mohamed Arkoun's approach of back-to-back oppositionist fundamentalism and what he calls militant secularism is risky, in that it benefits creeping fundamentalism. On the other hand, his call to exalt humanist tendencies in the history of Islam is a more urgent task than ever before. His project is to combat a double alienation: the alienation of the modern Muslim from a plural Muslim tradition and from a modernity that he feels as responsible for all his ills. The Muslim consciousness will become more welcoming to modernization by rediscovering Miskawayh, Tawhid, Ibn Sina, Ibn Tufayl, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Arabi and Ibn Khaldun. Although these great names are now used in Muslim societies for the purpose of apologetic business since they adorn avenues and public places, they are rarely applied to make known their works and to encourage the practice of critical thinking. Contemporaries such as Emir Abdelkader, Khayr al-Din al-Tunusi, Jamal al-

Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, should be added to the list of these classical and reformist critical writers.

Those such as Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri (1058) and other great figures of medieval Arabic literature are not strictly speaking the thinkers of classical Islam, but their role in the formation of a critical Islamic conscience has been crucial. This role has inspired some of our contemporaries, such as Jibran Khalil Jibran, Taha Husayn, Mahmud Mas'adi and Nagib Mahfuz, who have had a great influence on contemporary Arab consciousness. A more decisive engagement of the "literary men" in the "religious" debates would be welcome and constitute a substantial contribution to Islamic reformation. We can then mention Abdelwahab Meddeb's recent interventions which, in *Disease of Islam* and *Counter-sermons*, aligns the sensitivity of a poet and the delicacy of an observer to the present situation of Islam. Adonis' work in the 1970s and, more recently, those of Jamal Guitani and Abd al-Mu'ti l-Hijazi in Egypt, are also noteworthy.

However, it is important to avoid reductive presentations and easy solutions. It suffices to note two attitudes as an example. The first would be to bet on a so-called European Islam that would be cut off from all the problems facing Muslim societies. European Islam is a lure, as much from a historical point of view (Andalusia was more part of the Muslim world than of Europe) than from a contemporary point of view (the Muslim Brotherhood controls the majority of Islamic associations influential in Europe). However, one should not deduce from this observation Islam is a threat to Europe. We simply need to insist on the necessary solidarity of the two sides of the Mediterranean to face the major problems of our time. These problems are part of the same story. In spite of his lyrical impulses, and although Henri Pirenne's thesis comes alive today, Fernand Braudel was right to insist on unity within the Mediterranean area. In the works of the lesser known Marshall Hodgson, it is argued that the history of Islam is the link between the Medieval World and the Modern World and that we are entitled to speak of Afro-Eurasia as a geo-historical entity relevant to the premodern period. Closer to home, Alain de Libera explored the distant origins of European modernity going as far as Baghdad. It is therefore in solidarity between the West and the Muslim world that peace could take over conflicts and fanaticisms of all kinds. The problem of Islam can only be solved in its entirety.

The second attitude would be Islamic-Christian dialogue, in the sense that some of its Muslim actors believe they do well by projecting the schema of Christian "reforms" on Islam. Christian "liberal" Theology had called to free Christ from the grip of the Church. Muslims advocate for the search for the original message of Islam upstream of its history. This ahistorical attitude, which also amounts to using fundamentalist reasoning by reversing its conclusions, is echoed by some Western readers because it presents the situation of Islam according to a pattern they are familiar with. In fact, the institutionalization of a religion is not its original sin, quite the contrary. It is a compromise with the world, the one that prevailed at the time of this institutionalization. Tradition is not always further from modern times than Scripture and neither is Scripture from Tradition. What is most needed is not to bring a lawsuit against history, but rather to learn about a historical vision of the

past. The projection of contemporary desires upon the Holy Scriptures, as commendable as the intentions which determine this attitude may be, can never participate in the promotion of the latter.

Calling for a long and patient "criticism of Islamic reason," to borrow a term dear to Arkoun, does not mean accepting attitudes that lay claim to Islam and that undermine the foundations of modern life. We must also distinguish a long-term "fundamental reform" which will require long-term pressure to put an end to unacceptable situations. There are emergencies that cannot wait, such as respect for freedom of conscience, human dignity, gender equality, the primacy of citizenship, and the control of all violence.

6.3 The Emergencies

Islam has often been perceived by modern writers as an orthodoxy, that is, a set of indisputable doctrines. However, the Islam of the classical age was rather an orthopraxy, that is to say a set of behaviors legitimized by the religious language yet which corresponded with what the Muslim communities considered compatible with their interests and with their needs. Reformist thinkers have emphasized the changes they have undergone as a result of the changes in their times (the so-called *masalih* principle). Critical thinkers have highlighted the arbitrariness of the legitimations built by Islamic theologians and jurisconsults. By considering the logic of orthopraxis, by opposing conservatism to the spirit of "reformation" that originated in the nineteenth century, and by exercising a critical research on the formation and development of classical Islamic and scholastic thought, it would be possible to reestablish a living consensus for today's Islam. Dominant attitudes would change without Muslims feeling cut off from their religious tradition and cultural belonging.

The problem to be considered here, by way of example, may be that of freedom of conscience. Modern religious consciousness is a personalized consciousness. The norm is not defined outside the man, but in his consciousness and with his consent. The individual does not have to be subject to the *diktat* of the group. It is certain that one cannot speak of liberty, in general, without immediately asserting freedom of conscience. However, Muslim fundamentalism has made the notion of Jama'a (inalienable and passive membership of the community) its ideological battleground. Nevertheless, if this notion was forged very early in the history of Islam, probably to plug the wounds then caused by the *fitna*, it is nevertheless posterior to Muhammad, since it does not appear in the Qur'an. The institution of the caliphate, which was maintained over the centuries, continued the symbolism of an ever-united community, although in reality the community and the caliphate itself often had antagonistic ambitions. The fundamentalism that was born as a result of the abolition of the caliphate in 1924 supported the idea that every Muslim who dies without allegiance to the emir of the Jama'a dies in disobedience. Before 1924, the emir of the Jama'a was the *caliph*; after 1924, the fundamentalist groups declared themselves to be the beneficiaries of this allegiance. Now, it is easy to see what is

the difference between the classical and the modern situation in this respect: the notion of Jama'a was once used by the political powers to delegitimize all religious protest; at present, the same notion serves, on the contrary, to legitimize political Islam's challenges to powers and societies. There is therefore a double task to be envisaged to ensure the emancipation of the modern Muslim consciousness: that the "political" no longer controls the "religious" and that the "religious" no longer controls the "political."

A practical solution to this problem would be to re-emphasize today in Islam its concern for the human person at the expense of its obsession with the community that for centuries had taken over. For this, the personal relationship between the believing Muslim and the transcendent God should be enhanced, which is one of the principles of the Qur'anic Message. This does not, strictly speaking, mean a return to the Message, because the Qur'an exalts both the person and the community. There are verses of this type: "No constraint in religion! Truth is distinguished from error" (2256). But there are also verses of a different tone: "As for him who separates himself from the Prophet after having clearly known the true direction and who follows a path different from that of the believers, we will turn away from him, as he himself is diverted; We will throw it into Gehenna. What a detestable end!" (4115).

It only tried convince Muslims that they can remain faithful to their tradition while reversing the relationship between these two types of worries prevailing through a new exegesis. Indeed, theologians and old jurisconsults had postulated that the verses of the first type are repealed by those of the second type. There is nothing that invalidates or confirms it. This choice was perhaps then essential to maintain the social order among human groups prone to barbarism and disorder that only religion could frame and control, as the wise Ibn Khaldun said. A modern Muslim might consider that it is the verse of the first type that states the rule and that the second refers to a historical situation that was specific to Arab society of the seventh century. Nothing affirms or contradicts this exegesis either, but it is certainly now more useful for the Muslim to live in adequacy with the modern world. The principle of community interest (*maslaha*), as long as it does not oppose the letter of the Qur'an, can always be the basis of the attitude of the believing Muslim. Adopting the latter is not a break with tradition.

It goes without saying that the proclamation of freedom of conscience implies the abolition of all the provisions which contradict it and that of the punishment reserved for apostasy, which in any case has no Qur'anic foundation. It also implies the right to change one's religion or to declare oneself skeptical of dogmas, and also to assert oneself as agnostic or atheist. Freedom of conscience implies all this at once and its principle is therefore indivisible.

A similar attitude should be adopted to declare all provisions on corporal punishment obsolete. Classical Islamic law recognizes seven extremely serious offenses: apostasy, adultery, deliberate murder, brigandage, robbery, false accusation of adultery and drunkenness. Since prisons were nonexistent in seventh-century Arab society, the punishments for these crimes were corporal. Evidently these punishments today are opposed to human rights principles which are the ones on which modern

societies are based, which was not the case for medieval societies. Moreover, some of these offenses are no longer illegal in contemporary societies, such as apostasy, which should be abolished altogether.

It is important to note here that these sentences have always been used sparingly. This can be deduced from historical evidence or from the practices of modern countries that still practice the so-called Shariah. Two hypotheses are possible: (1) that Muslim societies were so pious that they seldom knew of homicides, robberies or cases of drunkenness, or (2) that Muslim societies rarely applied these penalties provided in the classic criminal law. Since the first hypothesis is absurd, we must explain the reasoning behind the second. Jurisconsults were not devoid of common sense: if they had maintained these sanctions, it was because they thought they were using them as deterrents. The severity of the sanctions did not prevent the crimes, certainly, but it prevented from trivializing and spreading them on a large scale. Members of modern societies, on the other hand, are supposed to be civilized citizens and it is unlikely that this system will retain any deterrent force against them. The evaluation of the offense is no longer the same, and the punishment is no longer aimed at the spiritual purification of the individual but rather at the fair management of social gaps. Another important aspect must also be taken into consideration: in order to limit the application of these punishments, the *faqihs* had subjected them to very restrictive conditions. Thus, the punishment for robbery did not apply if the thief had stolen something from his father or from the public good, because it was feared that the robbery was motivated by some unjust frustration in the thief. The *faqihs* were unanimous on the so-called *dar al-shubuhat* principle ("repel doubtful cases"), which stated that one must abstain from punishment in case of doubt about the offense.

These restrictive conditions imply, in modern society, the non-application of penalties or sanctions that have become absurd and unfair. Any delinquent, for example, could ask for the assistance of a lawyer who would soon find in the panoply of the *faqihs*' diverse and contradictory sentences something to plead in favor of doubt. A person who steals a motorcycle could have his hand cut, while another who diverts millions of the public good for his personal enrichment could receive a much more lenient sentence!

The so-called *dar al-shubuhat* principle could take on a different meaning today. Doubt is no longer thrown on this particular case, but on the very relevance of applying obsolete punishments in modern society. We know today that most of these punishments were only instituted after Muhammad's death. Moreover, historical research has proved that these punishments existed long before Islam, meaning he did not invent them and merely borrowed them. Why shouldn't contemporary Muslims borrow other forms of punishment more suited to the situation of modern man, such as prolonged imprisonment and the rehabilitation of delinquents? Finally, the system that insists on applying absurd and unjust penalties is put in question, especially since the severity of the sentences never guarantees the decline of delinquency. Better to give up punishment than to apply it in doubt, as the old *faqihs* used to say!

The problem of equality between men and women could benefit from the same treatment. It has been and remains one of the greatest issues of modern Muslim thought. Following their contact with the West, Muslim theologians began in the nineteenth century to choose the most favorable provisions to the principle of gender equality in the tradition. This was the case, for example, of the Tunisian reformist Ibn Abi Dhiyaf in his answers to a series of questions addressed to him by Léon Roche. In Algeria, Muhammad ibn Mustaf ibn Khujja published in his first book what was meant to be exhaustive on the subject. Reading these two books today, we can only be astonished by the few cases made to women by the first reformers and can imagine, therefore, what was the Conservative position at that time! Initiatives in favor of women in the nineteenth century were therefore rare and timid. Al-Tahtawi published a book on the reform of education where he planned to school girls. Faris al-Shidyaq wrote, during his exile in Paris in 1855, a daring book entitled *al-Saq ala al-Saq* ("The leg on the leg"), which, while reflecting on his bitterness towards his companion who had left for a rich man, calls for the emancipation of women and respect for their sexuality. But it was two later writers who were the most explicit on the subject of women's rights: the Egyptian Qasim Amin and the Tunisian al-Tahir al-Haddad, who have been discussed in a previous chapter. Women also participated in this advocacy movement, such as Nadhira Zayn al-Din and Huda Sha'rawi. From the second half of the twentieth century, the feminist movement has grown much more and has gained a large audience in many Arab and Muslim societies.

The current situation in the Muslim world is quite complex, especially since there is a disconnect between the facts and the law. Polygamy, for example, is rarely practiced, but it is prohibited by law only in Turkey and Tunisia. Repudiation is restricted everywhere by the compensation that the husband must pay in case of divorce. For women, traveling without the husband's permission remains prohibited in many Muslim countries, but only certain Gulf monarchies continue to respect this provision. It is true that, well before modern times, Muslim jurisconsults had begun to imagine various legal tricks to circumvent the situation of inferiority of the woman. For instance, since the dowry is obligatory in Muslim marriage contracts, they had imagined that the wife would benefit from an extremely high dowry, the greater part of which would be paid to her in the event of divorce: this way, the husband would lose his fortune or would be unable to pay the amount thus required if he repudiated it. Since marriage was considered to be a contract by the Muslim jurists, each of the contractors could include the clauses they wanted; the woman could thus demand, as a condition of marriage, that she be the only wife of her husband during her lifetime.

Finally, social conditions have been the most important in the evolution of women's situation. The transition to the nuclear family leaves, indeed, little chance for polygamy: the wife's salary becomes necessary to pay for purchase credits of the home and the children's schooling, making divorce as dramatic for the man than for the woman. Moreover, the man is no longer the only master of the house since he lost the monopoly of education and work; it is not uncommon to see women at work and men unemployed or benefiting from less advantageous financial situations. Admittedly, all this does not always protect the woman from the whims of the hus-

band. The battle for equality will only really be won when *de facto* situations will turn into *de jure* situations.

Muslim theologians and jurisconsults unanimously state that equality is a major principle of Islam. To comply with this principle, they accepted, with relative ease, the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century. Why didn't they adopt the same attitude when it came to women? Three reasons can explain this paradox. First, the inferiority of women is a social reality deeply rooted in the Islamic world long before Islam, to the point that theologians and jurisconsults have admitted this inequality to be natural and inscribed in the order of things. Secondly, they believed that the Qur'an spoke of slavery as an accomplished fact, without pronouncing on the question of its legitimacy, whereas it explicitly allowed polygamy in verse 4:3. Therefore, to forbid polygamy was to forbid what God authorized. Third, they refer to several other Qur'anic verses where the superiority of men over women is implicitly or explicitly admitted. Such arguments are easily refutable. The supposedly natural character of female inferiority is largely contradicted today by the level at which women have succeeded in all fields in all parts of the world, including in most of the Muslim world. The verses suggesting the inferiority of women are therefore to be taken as reflecting the social reality of their time, just like those who admitted slavery.

There remains verse 4:3 which reads as follows: "If you are afraid of being unfair to orphans, marry, as you please, two, three, or four women. But if you are afraid of being unfair, take only one woman or your war captives. This is better than supporting a large family." Muhammad Abduh's proposal has already been made that civil authority would be entitled to prohibit polygamy if it feels that its misdeeds on society are becoming too visible. The contemporary reformist Muhammad Shuhrur, in a book called *al-Kitab wa-l-Qur'an* (The Celestial Book and the Koran), offers a very relevant interpretation of this verse. He pointed out that at the beginning he spoke of widowed women, meaning the authorization of polygamy would have been given only to widowed women with dependent children who were deprived of resources: in this case a man could marry several widows with the pious intention of not leaving them in need and taking care of their children. The verse then speaks of the need to practice fairness, not with regard to wives, but to children. This would be a measure of solidarity. Also, in modern societies with social aids, there is no need for such a provision. Polygamy would then be, like slavery, an obsolete institution. This is especially true in light that, although the authorization of polygamy is an exceptional provision, it cannot oppose equality, which is a general and universal principle. And finally, why still defend the principle of a literal exegesis of the Qur'an and not apply this principle to the very case of verse 4:3 which speaks of polygamy only to help widows?

The Tunisian Personal Status Code adopted in 1956 is, despite what some say, a text that deliberately chose to be resolutely modern without striking head-on the traditional religious conscience: it formally forbids polygamy and repudiation. It was accepted by the Shaykh al-Tahir ibn Ashur, one of the greatest modern commentators of the Qur'an. Couldn't this Tunisian Code be, for the time being, a consensual platform today throughout the Muslim world?

There is no need to cut Muslims from their religious tradition to integrate them in the modern world. It is enough to convince them that all tradition remains linked to its conditions of production and that any text, sacred or profane, is a set of discourses that admit multiple interpretations. Islam has lived for a long time in the hope of converting all humans, but it is time for it to be converted in turn to the reality of modern times. Some examples of possible reforms have been given here, and the same method could be applied to all the problems currently facing Muslims.

6.4 Comparative Religions and Interreligious Dialogue

We must be careful, however, not to fall into the trap of exegetical polemics. It is not a question of looking for the authentic meaning of the Scriptures: at this game, the conservatives often come out winners, because the supposedly authentic meaning is never anything but the sense imposed by the weight of the habit. It is rather to develop a hermeneutic of the interpretative possibilities. Such hermeneutics does not pretend to be the "authentic message" or explain the celestial "intentions"; it intervenes only as human and verifiable knowledge to show the possibilities available to resolve each litigious case. The primacy must be given to what is in the interest of the women and men of Islam who live in our time. The tradition would then be reconsidered according to the organizing principles of the modern world.

A new religious dynamic does not mean a quarrel around the meaning of the sacred texts. It rather means an opening on the whole of the "divine experience," to use Michel Meslin's happy expression. Two aspects of this openness must be particularly encouraged: comparative studies of religion and interreligious dialogue. It is not only essential to encourage Islamology, in the sense given by Arkoun, that is to say the study of the Muslim tradition in the light of modern knowledge about man and society. It would also be necessary to go even further and to encourage the comparative study of religions, in order to de-passion and de-crisp the problems of Islam. Indeed, these problems are inherent in all religious traditions: there are no differences between them, only differences of case and experience; no exceptionalism, only specificities that are linked to diverse historical contexts. The science of comparative religions, rather than confining themselves to the exotic and the marginal, as it has done so far, would have an interest in tackling the essence of things, that is to say, the most urgent and sensitive problems, and to try to take up these problems in a comparative perspective. Religious traditions are differentiated answers given to diversified questions; however, behind the questions and answers, there has always been man and his destiny. It is he who has the gift of being able to communicate beyond the limits of space and time.

Interreligious dialogue would, in turn, help each tradition to better see each other by confronting others. The differentiated faith of Theology had served reformist Islam of the nineteenth century in order to consider a freer exercise of existential meditation and an opening within the Muslim religious tradition and to all Eastern religious traditions. It had imagined a religious consensus around a small number of

basic dogmas susceptible to multiple interpretations: the existence of a supreme Being, the just reward for good works, and the existence of some form of durability of the soul. This dogmatic base could bring together Eastern monotheisms and Indian religions, even Freemasonry of the time, which was not atheist. Abdelkader, al-Afghani, Abduh, and many others had inaugurated in their personal capacity a sincere dialogue with representatives of other religions. The decision of Vatican Council II to open a debate with Muslims allowed to resume this kind of activities on a more formal and institutional level. It is not in question here to go over a complete summary, but it is undeniable that he has helped the emergence of neo-reformism, as attested by the case of Mohamed Talbi.

It must be noted, however, that this debate is being undermined today, which can only make the position of the Muslim neo-reformists more difficult. Representatives of both sides, such as Hans Küng and Mohamed Arkoun, had expressed, after Vatican II, reservations about the content of the compromise proposed by the Declaration Nostra State on the relationship of the Catholic Church with non-Christian religions. They wished to go further to see the birth of an unambiguous document on its recognition of the other two monotheistic religions. Today, we are further from this goal than ever. From the Catholic point of view, this debate had little impact. From the Muslim point of view, this debate can only be useful if the Church of Rome unequivocally recognizes Islam as a religion of special value. Pope Benedict XVI's conference in Regensburg on September 12th, 2006, which provoked violent Muslim reactions in his time, did not cause a crisis for Muslim-Christian dialogue because it put an end to a situation of ambiguity that had lasted a long time.

Indeed, many problems remained unresolved, problems which, having been evaded in order to facilitate the dialogue, ended up compromising its chances of success. The category of skeptics and disengaged has only grown, as noted by Henri Tincq in an article published after the tragic events of 9/11 entitled "Is a dialogue between Islam and Christianity possible?". We need today a "dialogue of diversity" which consists of unsilenced in-depth debate and explanation of differences, as well as the confrontation of opinions without any animosity, but without complacency or compromise either. It is time to highlight the many virtues of dialogue that are most often forgotten: to provide an opportunity for everyone to question themselves when they dialogue with others. Interreligious dialogue is certainly a chance for Islam, provided it is relaunched on new and stronger foundations.

This debate should now rest on clear philosophical orientations. Hermeneutics has the merit of taking into consideration the consequences of dialogue for self-representation. Gadamer's idea of avoiding conflicts between human groups by pacifying their respective traditions is interesting, even if it seems rather idealistic. Hans Küng's idea of arriving at a universal ethic would be rather too optimistic. Pier Cesar Bori calls for an ethical compromise based on the historical and hermeneutic study of religious traditions. A synthesis between hermeneutics (Gadamer, Ricoeur), the "dialogic" philosophy of Habermas, and an open and critical history of thought systems (even a "deconstructive" history of them, in Michel Foucault's manner) would today the best intellectual framework and the most appropriate philosophical

response to oppose culturalist theories of shocks, of exceptions, and of founding myths in their different evolutions.

6.5 Re-spiritualizing and De-wahhabizing Islam

To avoid transforming a religion into a political ideology or into a fixed system of codification, it must be able to pursue its spiritual quest and divine experience. Mysticism once constituted, in Islam, its spiritual side. It is absolutely false to say that its presence was marginal. If Hallaj or Suhrawardi were executed, Junayd, Ghazali, Rumi, Ibn Arabi, Abd al-Karim al-Jill, and many others exercised an incontestable spiritual magisterium.

Muslim mysticism emerged unscathed from what may be called the threat of legalism in the fourth/tenth century, then the threat of puritanism in the eighth/fourteenth century. When the Ottomans took control of Islam in the tenth/sixteenth century, they accepted mysticism as a component of the religious landscape. The leaders of the religious brotherhoods were consequently granted a notability as important as that of the heads of the legal schools. Ibn Arabi, probably the greatest Muslim mystic, was called the Doctus Maximus (al-Shaykh al-Akbar) and the commentaries on his works numbered in the hundreds. This situation had the merit of encouraging mysticism and popularizing it in the form of brotherhoods. On the other hand, it had the defect of institutionalizing a sector of activity which, in essence, had to be free and spontaneous. Mysticism ended up being reduced to *confrérism*. Every Muslim had to choose his mystical brotherhood at the same time as his legal school: this is how spirituality has been codified in the same way as the law. It is obvious that, in spite of some remarkable witnesses of this Islam, the mystical phenomenon, as a whole, is also fixed and sclerotic. Later, during the confrontation between the Muslim World and Western expansionism from the nineteenth century, the mystical brotherhoods, which were generally not very politicized, were accused (sometimes wrongly) of having adopted complacent attitudes or having resigned face to this expansion.

In the Sunni world in particular, it must be remembered that modernity appeared in the context of the struggle against Ottoman tyranny and Western colonization. Mysticism, then reduced to decadent brotherhood, was accused on two counts of being responsible for the decline of the Muslim world. This is why national liberation movements were keen on eliminating *confrérism*, as postcolonial states saw it as an expression of superstition and ignorance. In this struggle against brotherhood, alliances were forged with the *faqihs*, the declared enemies and secular competitors of mysticism. Moreover, the ideology of progress had eventually reduced or marginalized any spiritual reflection: it had no reason to be in societies that wanted to be rational and modern. The crisis of the postcolonial state from the 1970s put the governments at odds with fundamentalism that drew its principles from puritanism of the eighth/fourteenth century, which was radically opposed to mystical thinking. Everything has thus contributed, for more than a century, to making mysticism the

public enemy of society. But without mysticism, there is almost nothing spiritual in the tradition of Islam.

It has already been proven that fundamentalism has perverted the history of modern Islam: to give Wahhabism historical legitimacy, it invented a fictitious line of succession from medieval puritanism to Wahhabism, and then from pan-Islamism to the Muslim Brotherhood. The fight against mysticism is one of the components of this pseudo-history. However, the history of modern Islam begins with two mystical masters famous for militancy against Western expansionism (but careful not to confuse this expansionist policy with the modernity that accompanied it): Abdelkader from the Maghrib and Jamal al-Din from the Mashriq. Muhammad Abduh had read so many of Ibn Arabi's work that he said he read his famous *Futuhat Makkiyya* (The Illuminations of Mecca), one of the most important and difficult text of classical Muslim mysticism, as if he read a novel!

The consequences of the situation quickly sketched proved disastrous. A deep break has been established between Muslims and their spiritual tradition. In the Sunni world in particular, it is difficult to find editions of Rumi or Shirazi. By fashion, Ibn Arabi has been rehabilitated, but his arduous style makes it inaccessible to the majority of Muslims. It should be noted, moreover, that his major work, *The Illuminations of Mecca*, is still on the index of al-Azhar. Despite the meritorious efforts of Louis Massignon and Henry Corbin to introduce Muslim mysticism into the history of classical philosophy, few historians of thought in Muslim universities still venture to follow this path. To a young Muslim who today would like to read a text of true Muslim spiritual experience, he is directed only to *al-Munqidh al-Dalal* by al-Ghazali who lived at the end of the eleventh century and whose works have been retouched by the guardians of orthodoxy. Few modern Muslims have recorded their spiritual journey in books worthy of the name. Islam, which has been reduced to an ideology of struggle during the wars of independence, does not seem to realize the extreme gravity of the state of a religion that continues to abandon its spiritual tradition. The most immediate consequence is the hegemony of absolute literalism in all religious debates.

To remedy this situation, two solutions can be envisaged. The first would be a reconciliation of Islam with the spiritual aspect of its tradition. To this end, it would be necessary to put into circulation the great texts of Muslim mysticism, to introduce the history of Muslim mysticism into university curricula, to encourage both individual and collective spiritual experiences to express and to manifest themselves, to deconstruct anti-mystiques narratives that too often orient the Muslim's vision of his distant and near past, and finally to build bridges between mysticism in its classical form and contemporary existential literatures.

The second is to open the spiritual experience of Islam to all of the universal mystical experiences. An inter-spiritual dialogue should be established in the same way as institutional dialogue between religions. Classical Muslim mysticism had largely drawn from pre-Islamic spiritual experiences; it did not hide it, quite the contrary. The spiritual experiences of contemporary Islam could emerge only in a context of spiritual confrontation that goes further than the territory of Islam, in which the spiritual, for the moment, seems dried up. For that, one would have to

accept a new definition of faith. The basic distinction introduced by Abduh between faith and Theology has already been mentioned: it has desacralized it and reduced it to its true dimension of human representation of the divine. It would be necessary to go even further and espouse the distinction proposed by the Christian-Hindu spiritual master Raimon Panikkar who defines faith simply as an attitude that accepts to open oneself to mystery. An opening to mystery does not imply dogmatic credo or theological positioning. It simply asks not to dodge the existential questions which neither established religions nor modern science can provide definitive answers for. Re-spiritualizing Islam to de-wahhabize it, or rather de-wahhabize Islam to re-spiritualize it, a program that has benefited from few initiatives. It should not be confused with a return to the mystical tradition to strangle the impetus of rationality or to return to the age of maraboutism and superstition. It is, moreover, obvious that medieval mysticism is no longer able to meet the needs of the modern Muslim, but it would essentially serve to push it to open up to the great spiritual and existential questions of our time.

6.6 Semper Reformanda

Should we repeat it again? This book does not mean calling for a pure and simple return to Muslim reformism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Rather, it serves to highlight the relatively bold spirit that characterized this reformism and suggest that, had its impetus continued, religious thought in Islam would no doubt have been more evolved today. The end of the reformist thrust of modern Islam can be explained by a complex context: colonial policies, the culturalist ideology of postcolonial states, the myth of progress, the failure of democracy and social justice in Arab and Muslim societies, the emergence of Wahhabi fanaticism and the Muslim Brotherhood, the role of oil in world politics, the Cold War and the use of Islamism as a bulwark in Communism, etc. All of this helped to make the dominant positions of the Muslim elites rigid. It was not the Muslim tradition that imposed itself, but rather the political manipulation of it, hence a deliberately distorted memory that was thus constructed in the context that was evoked. The essential thing was to deny Islamism the legitimacy of establishing itself as the authorized representative of this tradition and as the natural continuity of the reformed Islam of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. However, it is not only the Islamists who seek to maintain this amalgam, because at the same time, many secular writers suggest that there is no interest in distinguishing between tradition and memory, Islam and Islamism, reformism and Wahhabism. In addition to this position playing the role of the radicals, it has also been shown that it does not stand up to factual analysis and criticism of its arguments.

Proponents of the radical position consider that liberalism has fought glorious battles against the Papist theocracy, then nationalism, then Nazism, then communism. It faces today the challenge of Islamism, even Islam, as a new totalitarianism and a new global enemy. In other words, the Arab and Muslim world should be

strangled, as was the Soviet Union in the twentieth century, until it capitulates under the pressure of a set of economic, political and cultural causes. This is basically the substance of the theory of the "Clash of Civilizations" applied to Islam after 2001. This position is unrealistic, however, because if liberalism emerged victorious from these different struggles, it never faced a religion to eradicate it. On the other hand, socialism, a humanist ideology, turned into totalitarianism in countries where it waged a war of eradication against religions and traditions. The risk is even realer now that the liberal West is itself observing an uncontrolled upsurge of the "religious" whose limits and repercussions no one can predict.

There is no other realistic way than to encourage reforms in the Arab and Muslim world by encouraging progressive democratization, good governance, economy in the sole service of the people and, as is the subject of this book, the gradual but profound reform of representations and religious practices. Muslims must come out of their isolation to participate fully in the building of a new world that must be more just and more respectful of the balance between men, on the one hand, and between man and nature, on the other. This world cannot be built in peace if it ruptures with the fifth of humanity. We should not allow the feeling that this is a new crusade or a new religious war. It is more useful to work, from all existing religious traditions, to make reform a universal paradigm that applies to the case of Islam as to that of other religions and to face, collectively, the inopportune and anachronistic return to religious conservatism. It is known that, in all religious traditions, a background of exclusion and violence remains buried so that each is tempted to accuse the horrors of the other to justify his own mistakes and abuses. It should, of course, not wake up old, sleeping demons.

Chapter 7
Postscript: When Islam Awakens: Problematizing the Idea of Reformation (*Islah*) by Mohamed Arkoun

Abstract Abduh's originality, as it is presented in this book, is to have understood, anticipated, and experienced some fundamental conflicts between the Divine Law and the secular democratic law in what I have called, for this very reason, Book-book societies. Abduh is acquired in the positions of his liberal contemporaries; but, to protect his alim status among his peers, at al-Azhar in particular, he had to articulate his opinions, his positions, and his arguments in the strict framework of the orthodox mujtahid. Mr. Haddad clearly explains this uncomfortable situation and the didactic patience of a welcoming spirit to the modernity offered in France in the nineteenth century, but did so aware of its historical solidarities with the long Islamic tradition as it still prevailed in the Arabian-Islamic logosphere.

Keywords Vico · Orthodoxy · Islamic thought · Stateization of Islam · Thinkable · Unthinkable · Departure from religion

> *The civil world is entirely the work of men and we must therefore know how to find the principles in the modifications of our spirit itself.* (J. B. Vico, The New Science, 1725)

> In this perspective, the process of the imaginary constitution of the believing lineage, and its social realization in a community (or a population of communities) is precisely what constitutes, sociologically speaking (as I emphasize), the 'religious': we will therefore define as 'religion' any device – ideological, practical, and symbolic – by which the individual consciousness of belonging to a particular believing lineage is constituted, maintained, developed, and controlled.

I use the example of Islam the title of Alain Peyrefitte's bestseller, *When China Awakens*. The success of the book is explained by the burden of hope and fascination evoked by the Chinese people's departure from Maoist ideology to enter in the great history of liberal market economy. Today, we are also awaiting the departure from a world of Islam that has more than a billion adherents scattered around the planet, successive dogmatic fences where intellectual, spiritual, cultural, economic, and political life been underway since the 13th–14th centuries to regress, to freeze in ritual expressions and simplistic brotherly professions of faith. Islam and

M. Haddad, *Muslim Reformism - A Critical History*, Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations 11, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36774-9_7

Christianity are the only religions that have crossed all ethnocultural, linguistic, and socio-political boundaries to impose themselves in almost all contemporary societies from the first conquests to the great Ottoman, Persian and Mughal empires from the taking of Constantinople in 1453.

Such historical expansions require more than punctual and ephemeral reforms controlled by fixed systems of beliefs and non-beliefs. However, if the Islamic concept of *islah* is aimed at the utopian idea of a Muslim community. It remains in fact divided, limited to communitarianisms folded over their collective memories and their mechanical solidarities. To this day, the aspiration to the utopian *umma* potentially bringing together all of Allah's faithful continues to compensate for the shortcomings, the repeated discontinuities in the time and space of the State-Society-Nation relationship. The social, legal, and political fragilities of this trilogy are felt with all the more intensity as the postcolonial states have failed precisely in the announced, but not yet completed, construction of the indispensable democratic interaction between the rule of law, the sovereignty of the people as a civil society, and pride of belonging, to one that is strong, united, generous, and respectful to its citizens and, as a result, influential throughout the world. It is at this level of multiple demands, and beyond all narrow religious denominations and alienating ideologies, that the concept of inseparable reform of those of *res publica*, prerogatives of civil society, and now the march towards ever-widening spaces of belonging and citizen solidarity. Since its birth in 1953, the European Union has given the example of the exit of the historical stage of the nation-state to that of transnational spaces where nationalist sovereignism is erased in favor of an enlarged governance and where a citizen space is potentially open to similar evolutions in the world.

By over-radicalizing Islam, the Party-States *ipso facto* distort the question of *islah* as it was conceived and practiced until Muhammad Abduh. They display the desire to legislate for civil societies beyond the religious confessions of citizens; but they also oblige themselves to maintain the fiction of a divine law whose supremacy over all human law is explicitly or implicitly affirmed in constitutions "approved" by universal suffrage but subject to discretionary reorganization. A ministry of religious affairs politically manages an Islam whose orthodoxy is dependent on the power in place, thus excluding the doctrinal pluralism of the theological and legal schools which, until the 13th–14th centuries, ensured the intellectual fecundity of Islamic thought. As part of the ministry, a specifically Islamic High Council is supposed to give authoritative advice on the Islamic compliance of the reforms undertaken. Thus, at the level of the State, a definite position is erased during the inquisition (*mihna*) in the ninth century by Ibn Hanbal in this lapidary formula: the obedience [to power] of a human creature ceases when it leads to disobedience to the Creator. Thus stated, the principle can ground the modern idea of a firm distinction between the authority of spiritual authority reserved for Doctors of the Law recognized by their peers and the body of binding power of the *caliph* in the case of Sunnis. But it can also entail the usurpation of the prerogatives of legitimate power by the encroachments of *ulema* or leaders of brotherhoods who regulate the social imaginary through local politico-religious authorities.

On this point, Mohamed Haddad is right to examine the exceptional case of Abduh; for he is more explicit: "Islam has given neither the *caliph* nor the *qadi*, nor the *mufti*, nor the *shaykh al-Islam* the slightest authority in terms of doctrine and the formulation of norms. Regardless of their authority, it is a civil authority defined by the Islamic Law; and it is inadmissible that any of them may claim a right of control over the faith or worship of the individual, or may require him to defend his way of thinking."[1]

It is not anachronistic to say that the relationship between the realm of spiritual and moral authority and that of legitimate political power refers to Luther's struggle to assure for all Christians the right to examine Scriptures and to go out of the Catholic doctrinal Magisterium descending vertically from the successor of Peter and the hierarchy appointed by him to the lay faithful. To support such a new position in Islam, I myself initiated this pitiful yet historically defensible formula: Islam is theologically Protestant and politically Catholic. Because it remained politically absolutist and distant, the state power, from the installation of the Umayyad State in Damascus in 661, never stopped enslaving religion to its choices, thus confiscating this right of free examination to protect the faith of the faithful from abuses of arbitrary regimes. Abduh's postition is, in this sense, theologically subversive; but, politically and sociologically, it had no chance of succeeding either at the state level, or at the level of so-called doctors of the Law, or of the fraternal Islams.

The phenomenon of the stateization of Islam has never been so pernicious as in the life-time reigns of postcolonial state parties; for until the 1950s, no central authority had the tools, the police networks, or the pamphlets to control the speech, the conduct, the initiatives of every resident wherever he/she was in the world. It should be noted that I do not say citizen, because neither the concept nor the institution that would embody it legally and judicially really exist from the moment the constitution remains the Prince's discretionary instrument. On the processes of the stateization of Islam, I will add two observations that explain Abduh's failure, well highlighted by Mr. Haddad. The first deals with the management of religion for decades by the colonial regime, a thorny subject often discussed, but historically very little inscribed in the strong historical discontinuities that mark all the societies dependent on the Islamic fact in relation to the continuous rise, until nowadays, of European societies that no longer qualify as Christian. European revolutions have abolished the control of political Theology over the legitimacy of the power of secular states: in return, these states relinquish control of the churches; it is after these revolutions that the colonial regimes replace their political sovereignty with those weakened, fragile, and regressive in the land of Islam.

In the 1880s, the British settled Egypt leaving France to establish its protectorate over Tunisia and Morocco a little later. Abduh experienced these decisive changes. Like many historical actors in the Islamic world, he notes a considerable temporal, cultural, scientific, institutional, and economic gap between the European powers and what was once the vast home of Islam (*dar al-Islam*). From Morocco to

[1] Mr. Abduh, *Al-Islam wa- l-Nasraniyya*, 3rd ed., Cairo, 1922, 59.

Indonesia, Muslims take part in the increasingly haunting question thus formulated by a large number of reformers: *"Why does Islam, presented in the Qur'an as the only and ultimate version of the true religion, find itself in such a situation of powerlessness in front of Christian societies (religion of the Book, but altered) that had become hegemonic?"*

This formulation continues to resurface in many titles, debates, speeches; it perpetuates the never-before-seen mark of an apologetic framework of thought, regardless of any theological, historical, political, cultural, legislative or educational response. After the First World War, the nationalist liberation movements launched a fighting ideology that resulted in successive wars from the creation of the State of Israel to the reconquest in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. In other words, answers through reform are outdated; by fighting with arms to put an end to colonial regimes, we are radicalizing the perception of an imperialist, materialistic, cynical, immoral, perverse West even in its use of modernity.

Abduh's generation has not known the excesses of the armed struggles and rejection of modernity advocating Islamization without giving itself the necessary tools that do not have precisely the nationalist discourses of the present day. We approach the second observation about the passage of reformist thought to the subversive ideology which deprives itself of the tools of thought necessary to leave the imaginary representations of an Islam as an alternative already acquired in the Qur'anic text like Complete model of historical action without resorting to the Western model devoted to withering in favor of the Model of Medina. It is here that we need to look at the Paradigm of Reform proposed by Mr. Haddad to situate Abduh's case historically and doctrinally.

Before addressing the investigation into the contribution and limits of Abduh's role, it is useful to enrich our work of problematizing the Islamic concept of *islah* by asking about an attitude of the French colonial system in Algeria: the refusal to apply the 1905 law of separation of Church and State to the French departments of Algeria. Abduh died prematurely in Cairo that year. He has opened, within Islamic reason, a significant possibility to inaugurate a didactic process of diffusion of an introductory culture of the principle of secularism according to which the State must never use the arm secular in the service of any dogma, including religious dogma. This possibility is not supported then by the only Abduh; we are at a crucial moment of expansion of modern liberal thought with great animators of the *nahda*. I am not unaware of the socio-cultural obstacles and strategies of the colonial bureaucracy that made such a vision of the political and cultural future of the Mediterranean geo-historical space impossible through the Franco-Algerian, and today the Franco-Maghrebian examples. But the front of the refusal and the objective alliance between the colonial strategies and the internal ankyloses to the so-called Muslim societies has caused Algeria today to move away ideologically from its potential vocation of major mediating actor in the now open perspective of Union of this tragically divided Mediterranean area.

For comparison, I must add that contrary to the Islamic rejection of culture and secular thought, the Catholic Church has just confirmed its adherence to the 1905 law without any changes, after more than a century of resistance to any compromise

with secular modernity. It is true that the latter is gradually giving up the excessively exclusive neutrality of secularist responses to any mention of a secular teaching of religious facts. Secularism, as a critical control of all speech articulated by reason, including discourses and writings produced within the framework of the transmission of all knowledge, deals with the scientific knowledge of all religious facts. The principle of secularism extends its legitimacy to the task of validating any scientific division of the objects, fields, programs and applications of research in the sciences of man and society. It must no longer be content to protect the freedom of all cults arbitrarily isolated from the anthropo-history of religions that have managed for centuries all plans and all levels of historical deployment of the human condition. These considerations make it necessary to rest the recurrent question already present in the spirit and aims of the *nahda*: How to stop the mytho-ideological excesses of radical political Islamism to contribute to the global quest for a culture of peace by freeing everywhere what Mireille Delmas-Marty calls "the imaginative forces" of a new international law? This goes well beyond religious and necessary reforms, but is insufficient within the limits of nation-states.

7.1 Can We Speak of a Reformation Paradigm?

Mr. Haddad has modestly limited himself to opening the great file of *islah* from a turning point in the history of his practice. He has fulfilled the tasks announced in an introduction where the achievements of his doctoral dissertation devoted to the authentic work of Abduh are expanded and reinvested before the mutilations and the false recovery tests of which it was the object because of its political stakes, which increasingly outweigh the religious issues. These appear as such only in a reflective Theology based on a historical epistemology of religious sciences. These evolve with the dominant episteme at each stage of the history of thought. Al-Ghazali's great book on The Revitalization of Religious Sciences (*Ihya ulum al-din*) is a valuable reference point that shows that there can be no reliable religious reform without a reflexive Theology, leading to the foundation the critical relevance of this unavoidable discipline called historical epistemology. There is much work on this Theology in the Protestant lineage, followed more and more by the Catholic lineage. But with the fundamentalist regression of contemporary Islamic thought, illustrated by successive condemnations of the contributions of Abduh, Ali Abd al-Raziq, Taha Husayn, Nasr Abu Zayd, and many others, even the theological debates sketched in the pluralistic and epistemic framework of classical Islam are doomed to be forgotten by the anachronistic rhetoric on Islamic reform, widely publicized in the world.

Much has been written about the immense work of al-Ghazali; but there is little known of any detailed study of the epistemology which founds, in the *Ihya*, the critique of the uses made of the religious sciences in this key period (11th–12th centuries) of the history of Islamic thought. At 70 years of age, Ibn Rushd's refutations of al-Ghazali's argument admirably underline several shocks in the episteme that underlie the fundamental tensions between religious and philosophical sci-

ences. But this is precisely the hard core, at once intellectual, spiritual, and cognitive, of all religious reform in general, and *a fortiori* in all the Islamic contexts identified by historians. Mr. Haddad even risks starting from a programmatic definition of what he calls the paradigm of the Reformation. It is worthwhile to stop there to widen the problematic of *islah* and to reinforce some pathways.

We define religious reform as an attempt to rehabilitate the representation of the sacred with the demands of fundamentally new situations. It is from this definition that we affirm that there are structural similarities between the situations of religious traditions. We also insist on the "valorizing" aspect in this process; it is this aspect that makes interpretation the means of reformation and allows believers to accept renovation under the guise of homecoming, because, from a believing point of view, return is a journey to the future, and the sources are paradigmatic moments and not events of the past.

Methodologically, it is necessary to start from the epistemic base common to all religious reform in order to inaugurate a comparative knowledge of the major religions that have a social, cultural, and especially political visibility in all contemporary societies, including where historicist positivism and Stalinist atheistic religion have been used as "scientific" outlets of traditional religions. The historical knowledge of the epistemic bases helps each religion to revise its dogmatic certainties about the true religion which authorizes and even commands the definitive rejection of heresies, sectarian deviations, alterations of the Scriptures, etc. In this respect, Mr. Haddad succeeded in creating, at the University of Tunis, the first Masters program devoted to the comparative history and anthropology of religions. This initiative was difficult difficult to achieve, and especially to maintain in the current Islamic contexts. Comparatism is more urgent and above all immediately liberating in the Mediterranean area where the three successive versions of prophetic monotheism have emerged successively and, in parallel, a different and fruitful second axis for the general history of human thought: it is reason and philosophical attitudes that will allow rich confrontations between philosophical reason and theological reason. This structures the systems of beliefs and non-beliefs not only of the three great branches of the monotheistic tree, but also of secondary branches treated as harmful without being able to cut them. I must underline the novelty of this open and comparative view of the general history of thought that has long been unthinkable in a Judeo-Christian Europe and exclusive heir to the "Greek Miracle." The quarrel on this point has just rekindled with the Sylvain Gouguenheim's book, *Aristotle at Mont St Michel: The Greek roots of Christian Europe*, Seuil, 2008.

The comparative approach obliges us to include, in the exhaustive study of religious facts, not only the three great branches qualified as orthodox and authentic version of the true religion, but also the secondary branches which have grown and have become self-proclaimed authentic versions. Mimetic overbidding on the authenticity and status of true religion is spreading in dense trees that form the inextricable forest of religious facts. Comparatism thus leads to a more ambitious task of exploring the entire forest to identify effectively harmful growths (sectarian phenomena such as Scientology threatening societies) and vigorous branches that have withstood centuries of historical vicissitudes. For the first time in the history of

religions, the exploration is conducted by anthropological historians with referents and critical criteria, not with dogmatic postulates that hide essential questions by branding the prosecution against blasphemies arbitrarily defined to humiliate the human spirit.

The question of the paradigm of reform in the vast historical field of the Islamic branch calls for the inclusion of secondarized branches that have survived the recurrent struggles of mutual exclusion. The historian goes further because he must identify, over time, branches that have grown but have been cut and doomed to oblivion. Among the numerous examples of these abortions, which are desired by jurists and their secular arms, are the Mu'tazilite school of thought, the Zahirite school exemplified in Andalusia by a polygraphist, polemicist, writer and exceptional thinker, Ibn Hazm (994–1060), and even more seriously the very precious current of philosophical thought. With such politically and socially programmed mutilations, a paradigm of reform can only be reconstructed by re-bridging the narrowed field and the sterilized parts of the historical pluralism of classical Islamic thought.

That said, it is understandable that Mr. Haddad voluntarily limited his critical record to the Sunni lineage that held his reference figure as Abduh. I would add that the Imamian lineage of Islamic thought is so rich that it cannot be evoked on the sidelines of the Sunni lineage. I discovered this wealth when I was writing my doctoral thesis in the 1960s about the Miskawayh and Tawhidi generation. Among other contributions to the study of what I have called the critical knowledge of the *Exhaustive Islamic Tradition*, I note an article, published in Henry Corbin Mixtures in 1977, called "For a Consolidation of Islamic Conscience." I hope that Mr. Haddad will take up this precious vein by dedicating a specific inquiry to the Imamian paradigm – including the Ismaili branch – of *islah*.

The *idea of a valorizing rehabilitation of the representation of the sacred to the demands of fundamentally new situations* is problematic for all the exhaustive Islamic Tradition I have just mentioned. From the opening sketched by Abduh towards a modernizing pragmatic rationality, we reach the exit of the dogmatic fences where the researches on the search of the positive reform for the *umma* take place to enter the modern framework of the good reform in the sense of the *res publica*, good for every citizen of the Republic, beyond all the denominational and ideological belonging of its citizens. I did not read all of Abduh's writings closely enough to say whether or not he had a clear awareness of the issues involved in this transition from the religious to the modern framework of political philosophy.

Whatever the case may be on this crucial point of the thinkable and the unthinkable in any exercise of contemporary Islamic thought, there remains the great difficulty of the indispensable work of reconceptualization in the languages marked by the traditional vocabulary specific to Islamic thought ingrained in the founding conceptualization not only with the example of the Qur'anic discourse, but with the earlier interventions of what I have called the prophetic discourse collected in the Bible and the Gospels. This factual historical-linguistic data is unavoidable; and yet it is practically evaded as a reductive and desecrating treatment of the contents of the orthodox faith. In Islam, the case of Arabic weighs heavily on its status as a human language elected for the literal, grammatical and rhetorical articulation of

the Word of God, *ipsissima verba*, as Muslims who have access to Latin like to say. This is concrete psycho-socio-historical-linguistic data which constitutes the unshakable basis of all the dogmatic strategies of cancellation of historicity in general and more particularly of the functional interactions between language, society, and thought in the formation and the discursive productions of every human subject. Thus arises the question of whether to stick to the stage of reform as a strict return to the unassailable and intangible inaugural form of the articulation of the Divine Commandments and Forbearances or to subvert all forms and institutions of human mediation of a divine Word, thus transferred de facto to the concrete history of men in society. It is the cognitive alternative always in debate that Vico states in the quoted proposal in this postface.

Here are some concrete examples to illustrate what I call the cognitive alternative. The concept of the sacred still remains very vague in Islamic thought, and particularly in its Arabic expression. The same term *muqaddas* is used to refer to two concepts – sacred and holy – well differentiated in the European languages and constantly enriched with the contributions of the sciences of man and society. The root appears 76 times, in various forms, in the Qur'an with the idea of taboo applied to objects, spaces, specific times, food, etc. The taboo involves the differentiation of pure and impure and the state of ritual purity to perform acts or approach places, to pronounce words otherwise forbidden. The domain of the sacred is more extensive and complex than that of the saint, a status of surpassing the rituals obligatory in many relationships with the sacred. The five legal qualifications (*al-ahkam*) that codify the religious and profane conduct of the believer are lived as indisputable rules that spell out the limits set by God (*hudud Allah*) to attain eternal salvation after a just and righteous life on Earth. Modern analyzes of the sacred liberate man from many taboos without abolishing, however, certain functions related to any ethico-politico-social order, namely the sacred, which implies the punished and purifying sacrilege of the saint in religion and of the glorified hero in a secular context.

There are other key concepts of critical thinking such as myth, secularism, state, anachronism, and imaginary construction of belief that are not yet operative in languages still dominated by networks of secular religious or ideological connotations (secular religions such as the official atheism of the Soviet regime). We cannot rework and reclaim the concept of *islah* without intense a conceptualization accessible to large numbers in the Arab logosphere and probably Persian, Urdu, Tajik, etc.

Another difficulty arises with respect to rehabilitation, which considers the demands of new situations. What happens in recurring crisis situations since the distant one of 1929? All states mobilize experts to take emergency measures and limit the damage without really assuming the programmed genesis of crises and their deep structural dimensions. Uncertainties, trial and error, and retreat are even more alarming when it comes to reforms reduced to the religious field where dogmas reassure believers and erase uncertainty and doubt. Olivier Abel has dedicated a stimulating book to Pierre Bayle entitled *Confidence in Doubt* (Labor and Fides, 1995). To this salutary trust, Ibn Khaldun, though renowned for his innovative analyzes, reassures us with this definition of Islamic Theology: *"The science of* kalam

provides the means to prove the dogmas of faith by rational arguments and to refute the innovators who, as far as beliefs are concerned, depart from the doctrine of the people of tradition, the very essence of these dogmas being the profession of the unity of God." (*Muqaddima*).

It should be verified whether Abduh endorsed this definition in his short *Treatise on the Oneness of God*. It cannot be said, indeed, that this text revives the theological reflection that has remained without serious consequences since the unchallenged consecration of al-Ashari's intervention (m. 935). The theological and philosophical vacuum after Ibn Rushd is one of the important factors in the undeniable weakness of the reformist practice before and after the intervention of Abduh and his contemporaries, presented by Mr. Haddad. By entrusting the work of valorization to the interpretation as means of the undercover reformation of return to the sources, we run two major risks. On the one hand, we endorse the trivialized practice, even in European circles, of covering by Qur'anic quotations conduct and norms related to the ideological instrumentalizations of the founding text, much more than to critical hermeneutics that make the spiritual requirement of any human experience of the divine prevail. On the other hand, we conceal or deliberately evade two questions upstream of all recourse to the reform:

1. Hermeneutics can no longer dodge or reject as sacrilege the questioning of the cognitive status of the Revelation in its first oral utterance and in its textual form in the Bible, the New Testament and the Qur'an;
2. Nor can we elude or condemn, as does the overwhelming majority of today's Muslims, the intense debates in Christian contexts on the departure from religion as a global responsibility for the emancipation of the human condition. We can conceive a contribution of religion in constant exchange with the scientific and philosophical authorities; but we cannot only trust the theologico-political magisterium, even based on the most demanding hermeneutics. It is urgent for Islamic thought to engage with thinkers such as P. Ricoeur, J. Derrida, Gianni Vattimo, R. Girard, JP Changeux, P. Gisel, Julia Christeva, M. Gauchet, and many other great practitioners of disciplines that radically subvert all inherited knowledge. At the level of states and public opinion, the ritual expressions of Islam have such a hold on the ongoing history of societies that reformist initiatives or attempts to revive critical thinking give rise to immediate reactions of mistrust, of fear, and eventually of rejection. Alliances of women and men similar to Qasim Amin's for the emancipation of the status of women generate more massive and effective responses than during campaigns to abandon the veil. *A fortiori*, to speak of the departure of religion in today's Islam is simply unthinkable.

Abduh's originality, as it is presented in this book, is to have understood, anticipated, and experienced some fundamental conflicts between the Divine Law and the secular democratic law in what I have called, for this very reason, Book-book societies. Abduh is acquired in the positions of his liberal contemporaries; but, to protect his *alim* status among his peers, at al-Azhar in particular, he had to articulate his opinions, his positions, and his arguments in the strict framework of the orthodox

mujtahid. Mr. Haddad clearly explains this uncomfortable situation and the didactic patience of a welcoming spirit to the modernity offered in France in the nineteenth century, but did so aware of its historical solidarities with the long Islamic tradition as it still prevailed in the Arabian-Islamic logosphere. This historic moment of the *nahda* is the dream of today's Muslims facing the harsh ideological polarizations of the infernal Islam versus the West couple and the repeated crises of a European modernity perceived and received by the generation of Abduh, al-Afghani, Atatürk, Taha Husayn, Khayr al-Din, Huda Sha'rawi, Qasim Amin, Salama Musa, and Jirji Zaydan as a model of historical action adaptable to societies of Islamic tradition.

Rifa'a al-Tahtawi's earlier generation had already prepared the psychological ground for this entry of the Iran-Turco-Arab-Islamic Islamic geo-historical complex into modern history by choosing the didactic and cultural path rather than the successive wars that have ravaged the Middle East since the 1950s. The chances of such a choice were not negligible on the Muslim side. Indeed, before al-Tahtawi's intervention in the reception of the *nahda*, there was the pathetic example of Emir Abdelkader's behavior before the "glorious" conqueror Bugeaud between 1832 and 1842: a naiver conscience still facing a violent conquest, since it turns out that Abdelkader grew up in Ibn Arabi's mystical Islam, so different from the predominant brotherly Islam in the Maghreb of that time. After yielding to the obligation of *jihad*, he chose to stop a fight that was too unequal and deadly for his people; he decided to return to Ibn Arabi's spiritual *hijra*, very different from that of the Prophet Muhammad of Medina's *hijra*. Subversive response of mystical love to the conquering political will of a republican European power and still more Christian than today – for the Church accompanied the conquest.

The desire for empire and enrichment has prevailed in Europe on the principles of a seductive modernity by its announcements and its first fights for the "universal" man, but has been unable to date to take note of its ideal drifts, of its romantic lies, and its romantic truths to paraphrase a famous title of Rene Girard. There are still teasing announcements of development aid to contain the flow of immigrants from former colonies; and the increasing number of settled immigrants express their malaise between the violence of a radical Islamism and the obsession of growing Islamophobia. When historians evoke the golden age of the liberal *nahda* from 1830 to 1940, they forget to complete the optimistic picture by two major historical surveys: on the one hand, the analysis of socio-cultural conditions of reception or rejection of modernity in the conquered ex-countries, and on the other the evaluation of actual offers and calculated retentions of modernity by the colonial system. Thus, the Crémieux decree grants French nationality to all Jews in Algeria and, moreover, the application of the 1905 law is rejected with the necessary educational prudence in Algeria. Today, this two-edged observation will cheer the nationalist fervor of many Algerians, but will outrage all those (even more numerous) for whom the separation of the Church as a religious institution from the state as a neutral body of management of a secular citizen space is an intolerable attack on the identity of a "Muslim" nation.

We are driven to the beating heart, to the hard core of any initiative of reform in any social-historical context governed by constitutions where it is written that no

human law can, in case of legislative conflict, supplant the Divine Law. This clause is written either explicitly or implicitly in constitutions approved by "popular" suffrage in the land of Islam. We even try to introduce it as an exceptional status, in European and American legislation. Behind Mr. Haddad's reminders and analyzes of the injustice done to Abduh's work and pragmatic initiatives, as well as the regressions that have led to the current dead ends in the management of religion and politics, is the problematic that I have just made explicit either to open up new sites of knowledge and historical action or to allow the State-Parties to exercise the monopoly of "legal violence" by simultaneously manipulating the fiction of a democracy without democrats and without democratic culture, and the illusion of a Shariah ignored in its real historical genesis, confused with positive law named *fiqh* and cut off from its inaugural debates in the early centuries of the formation of Islamic thought. The translation of the term Shariah by Divine Law confirms the transcendentalization and the sacralizing power of original Arabic. In contemporary Islamic discourse, the term *fiqh* is used to accentuate the overvaluation operation – there is still no critical Theology to correct these manipulations.

Mr. Haddad completes his book with a third chapter to question the perspectives of modern Islam distinguished from classical reformism and ends with an epilogue on the reforms in Islam today. Numerous examples of authors, works, promising efforts, relevant initiatives that have been aborted for multiple reasons that Mr. Haddad identifies with lucidity. We will retain the judicious criticism of the long article on the concept of *islah* in the 2nd edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam. The author does not aim at the now outdated criticism of classical Orientalism, but his project of clarifying the methods, the postulates, the ends, and the "objective" expectations of any reforming initiative in yesterday's and today's Islamic contexts imposes ever more reflective and critical writing of the concept of *islah* in the Islamic tradition compared to those of other related religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, but also to the reformism underway in liberal societies.

Under the titles "theologico-philosophical renewal," "neo-reformism," or "modernism and criticism," we can find more or less detailed presentations of contemporary speakers, most of whom are still alive: Hasan Hanafi, bid al-Jabr, Mohammed Iqbal, Mohammed Talbi, Said Ashmawi, Maududi, Mohammed Charfi, Jalal al-Azm, Hicham Djaït and myself. Of course, we can add other names that show the great diversity of positions and visions in play. The merit of this third chapter lies in the projects and the diversity of research topics and debates that are suggested along the way. There is enough to write another great book that would exhaust the question of religious *islah* as pragmatic reforms of unbridled liberalism. The current global crisis emphasizes the urgency of a thought and a history of solidarity of peoples and cultures to ensure the emancipation of the human condition without any exclusion, hegemonic polarization, or scandalous gap between the powers and the residues, and with complete civilizations and archaic cultures abandoned to all forms of underdevelopment, spaces of peace and fulfillment and unpunished tramps of human dignity.

A last word on the usefulness of comparisons. The author might have added as an appendix or an afterword a confrontation between two contemporaries: Ibn Abd

al-Wahhab (1703–1792) and E. Kant (1724–1804). In the context of the eighteenth century, religion is not at all thought of as a universal phenomenon through the Islam of the Hijaz, and in this eighteenth century revolutionary in the rising European Enlightenment. Kant includes religion and God as problems in *The Critique of Pure Reason and Practical Reason* and in a book entitled *Religion in the Limits of Reason*. And what did Saudi Islam do about the reform of 'Abd al-Wahhab and the European Christianity of Kant's legacy?

This comparison makes it possible, among other tasks, to rethink *islah* through the two interactive couples of the thinkable and the unthinkable and of thought and unthought in the religious traditions and the paths of modern reason in Europe and in the world from the sixteenth century to the present day. When Islam awakens, it finally recognizes that the battles of philosophical hermeneutics since Kant, meaning to rethink God and religion, ignore the blasphemy and try to explore a new space of exchange and solidarity with a critical Theology which accepts to make a path leading to the same goal of irrefutable promotion of the creative capacities of the mind and especially of reason emerging in a plurality of cognitive paths.

Reference

Abduh, Mr. 1922. *Al-Islam wa- l-Nasraniyya*. 3rd ed, 59. Cairo: al-Manar.