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ARTICLE

Modernist interpretations and their impact on the Koranic text

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Abstract

The Arab and Islamic arena in general is witnessing modern intellectual calls, not limited to the political, social, and cultural aspects; rather, they have extended to an essential component of the nation's identity and civilization, namely the Holy Koran, where we have begun to hear bold debates about it that have not respected its sanctity. Rational modernist interpretations have plunged into undermining the source of the Holy Koran and linking it to the specific nomadic historical nature that accompanied it; these interpretations and readings have thus acquired the character of desecrating every sacred, thereby subjecting the Koranic text to the rational authority of modernism.

The research seeks to answer the following questions: What is the nature of modernist readings of the Holy Koran? Who are their most prominent representatives? What are the most important rational interpretations that stripped the Koranic text of sanctity? And what impact have these interpretations left behind?

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Introduction.

There has been much debate about modernist readings and interpretative approaches that have resulted in a range of studies, whether on the intellectual, political, cultural, or social levels. In an ancient time past, the discussion was about Orientalists and intellectual invasion, and it was about political colonialism; we used to speak of the occupation of land and the colonization of the homeland. Today, however, the nature of Orientalism has changed, and the nation has been targeted in its essential foundation and solid structure, with the Holy Koran becoming the subject of wide debate and bold controversy.

It is no longer just a matter of talking about or discussing the Koran, whether it is a product of its environment or eternal beyond time and place; the discussion now concerns the Holy Koran itself. In this context—the context of the frenzied campaign against the Holy Koran and the great heritage of the nation—modernist readings and new interpretive approaches emerged. Among their claims is the following: *“The old interpretations stem from a specifically historical conceptual awareness, and the Koran in its entirety is capable of being subjected to a different mental projection in a more advanced civilizational stage in our era.”*

The Orientalist debate strikes at the history of the Holy Koran, as in the case of the Orientalist Régis Blachère, who saw its interpretation as limited to its specific historical environment. He attacked the order of its surahs, questioned the credibility of its verses and its scientific and cosmic miracles, supported the claim that the Prophet ﷺ was influenced by previous religious texts, and attributed its source to Judaism and Christianity. The matter did not stop there; it continues. Orientalism evolved in its view of the Koran, and today the American Pentagon speaks of a new alternative to the Holy Koran, which they called *“The True Furqan,”* containing several surahs (such as Surah of Love, Peace, the Disciples, Righteousness...). It stirred up *“suspicions that are not new, but rather old and*

repeated, foremost of which is the denial of Muhammad's ﷺ prophethood and belittling the Holy Koran and what it contains of doctrines and rulings."

Thus, what is the nature of modernist readings of the Holy Koran? What are their most important forms, foundations, and principles? Who are their most prominent figures and claimants? How did these rational secular interpretations contribute to stripping the Koranic text of sanctity? And what has been the extent of their impact on the intellectual level and on social awareness?

First: The Concept of Modernity.

The term refers to the profound transformations that Western society went through, moving it from an old era to another that differed from it in every aspect, or it is a newly coined expression in the philosophical and intellectual domain. **Taha Abderrahman** summarized modernity in several concepts, the most important of which are: *"First, advancing the causes of reason, progress, and liberation. Second, practicing the three sovereignties through science and technology: sovereignty over nature, sovereignty over society, and sovereignty over the self. Third, cutting ties with heritage and seeking renewal, or erasing sanctity from the world, or severing ties with religion..."*

The term modernity is also used to refer to a philosophical content or political approaches and intellectual expressions, meaning modernity in a purely Western sense, with a deep philosophical system—namely, secularism and materialism. This entails excluding religion in one way or another, excluding values, which is known as humanism (the deification of reason), whereby nothing is considered except through reason. Likewise, it is the exclusion of everything metaphysical, unseen, or moral.

This is a major aspect of modernity, although modernity itself with its approaches and contexts differs from postmodernity, which is another stage based on modernity with a new concept and renewed approaches. In this stage, religion, values, and morals are recalled, and there are several revisions, including, for example, the concept of democracy and what it has led to in terms of humanity's various sufferings.

Thus, modernity is highly complex intellectual and practical systems; it is the outcome of Western experience in different fields. It is *"a subject that was begun by religious reformers, followed by some contemporary researchers, but all analyses are either partial and do not cover the whole, or they merely express wishes and good intentions to renew heritage, or rhetorical expressions and stylistic devices that stir people's enthusiasm and reveal more about the writer than they uncover, or they remain captive to the molds of Western heritage, renewing through them. It is thus renewal from outside heritage, not from within it."*

Second: The Nature of the Modernist Reading of the Koranic Text.

Linguistically, "reading" means joining and gathering. Here it refers to applying modernist methods and contemporary theories to the understanding and interpretation of heritage texts in general, and the Koranic text in particular. At the outset, it should be noted that these modernist readings were an alien interjection, outside time and place. Meaning that if we trace the history of interpretations and the approaches presented to the Koranic text, from its revelation to the era of codification and down to our own time, we would find that these modernist readings are not historically connected to the nation, nor are they connected to its present reality.

This is because, as **Taha Abderrahman** put it, *"connected creativity"* is one of the two gateways through which Muslims can enter the sphere of modernity—namely, that they renew the interpretation of the Koran, or in modern terms, renew its reading, following the path of connected creativity that distinguishes the Islamic application of the spirit of modernity, not the path of disconnected creativity followed by modernist readings of the Koranic verses. These aim essentially at a radical and total severance from Islamic civilizational heritage, foremost of which is the Holy Koran, separating it from its people and followers.

Modernist readings deliberately twist the meanings of the Koranic text by applying Western modernist methods to it, i.e., humanizing the reading and rationalizing it, as in the readings of **Mohammed Arkoun** and **Mohammed Abed al-Jabri**, or in the structural reading of **Mohammed Shahrour**, or the interpretative reading of **Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd**. These readings stirred widespread controversy, requiring attention to the nature of their differences, as well as answering an important question and resolving an ongoing issue: What is the nature of these readings? Did they contribute—as their proponents claim—to lifting the nation from its reality of defeat and decline to a horizon of civilizational advancement and prosperity? Or were they a calamity upon it, a means of distorting scientific truths

and established Koranic certainties? And what effect did these modernist readings leave on social reality, scientific awareness, and people's lives?

While the early scholars treated the Koranic text as a source of legislation, a fountain of rulings, and a constitution for life, modernist readings sought—most often—to establish a project of epistemological and methodological rupture with heritage and ancient writings in general, and with the Holy Koran in particular, under claims of renewal and rational humanization. These were characterized by daring against the sanctity of God's words, subjecting them to the rationalist authority of modernity, in search of surpassing them intellectually, moving them from the level of transcendence to acknowledgment of their susceptibility and subjection—like any other text—to the natural course of time and its effects.

The modernists wrote these readings under the influence of Western methods and philosophical sciences, exerting great effort to show objectivity to their readers and audiences. But to no avail, as their propositions regarding the Koranic text necessitated rebuttals. Modest, individual, and scattered responses emerged, which only increased the intensity of the declared intellectual assault on the Holy Koran.

Thus, groups influenced by Western modernist currents and their philosophical outlooks launched frenzied campaigns against the Wise Book without shame: *“They repeatedly asserted that the Koran was revealed in a specific historical era, with its own circumstances, means, and characteristics. With the passage of ages, the opening of civilization, and the West's attainment of the pinnacle of progress and modernity, it became necessary to change interpretive methods in accordance with the times. Those in ancient times were appropriate for their age, but our time is not theirs.”*

Accordingly, this research seeks to provide a brief synthesis of the nature of these modernist readings, highlighting their evidentiary foundations, which were not born today, but began at the dawn of the 20th century, specifically with attempts to apply Western methods (linguistic, social, literary...). Based on this historical and epistemological data, the readings can be classified into several types, including:

First: The Literary (Rhetorical) Modernist Reading.

This reading was led by a group of thinkers who convinced themselves that the Holy Koran is a text that can be treated literarily, just as any poetic or prose text is treated. **Adonis** is considered the most prominent theorist of modernity in the Arab world and the standard-bearer of this reading. His modernist reading related to the Koran first appeared in his book *The Koranic Text and Horizons of Writing*, in which he opened the door wide for critique and responses. There, he began by diminishing the words of God Almighty, considering it a linguistic text (as his fellow modernist thinker **Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd** also did).

Adonis said: *“I indicate first that I speak of Koranic writing as a linguistic text, outside every religious dimension, both in theory and in practice: a text we read as we read a literary text.”* Meaning that the poetic approach to the Holy Koran makes each of its surahs a crucible of various literary genres. Adonis says: *“Most surahs are crucibles in which sermon, parable, hymn, dialogue, story, and prayer melt together...”*

For him, the Koranic surahs, particularly the Meccan ones, have their own special rhythmic system. He divided them musically according to their melodic cadences. *“During his musical analysis, he pointed out that some surahs are narrative, echoing (in his view) the stories of the Torah, and that some are influenced by ancient scriptural styles...”*

He describes the deep internal structure of the Koranic text as *“a melody, and we can speak of it as a melody. Its melodies do not fall within a specific system or fixed metrical order, making them dynamic and open.”* [Exalted is the Holy Koran above this nonsense and folly, infinitely.]

Furthermore, he disparages the prevailing reading of the Holy Koran (namely, the old books of tafsir), which reveal the intent of the Wise Legislator. He denounces them, saying: *“They are, rather, a reading that does not make of this text a horizon, but rather makes it a tunnel. The reason for this lies in many things, especially the predominance of the legal perspective, whereby Sharia appears as the sole foundation for thought and action, for the universe and things. This is thus a reading that necessarily privileges the ideological-political perspective. In this way, the Muslim, according to this legal-political reading, finds himself confined between the legal and the political: his freedom vanishes, his being is extinguished from within, and he feels like a machine moved by the hand of the law—that is, the hand of politics.”*

And another calamity among the calamities of *Adonis*, which he claims in his alleged rhetorical and modern literary reading, wherein he brought forth an astonishing matter that never ceases to amaze. For *Adonis* leapt from reading the Qur'anic text to speaking about its Wise Revealer, the Noble Speaker, in a manner unbefitting of Him, Exalted is He. He said concerning Him what he said, and persisted in raising a question which he claims *must* be raised, and stated verbatim:

“The question that must be raised in this context is: what does a person do who sees that God is not primarily a legislator, nor a protector of the law, nor a king—but rather that He is, first and foremost, beautiful, generous, and loving?”

This is the so-called literary reading according to *Adonis*!

Adonis began introducing modernity through the gateway of literature and poetry until, gradually, he reached the point of saying what he said about the Qur'an—and this is an undeniable fact. Poetry was the first to be subjected to change before anything else, so that modernists could make it a vehicle to reach the alteration of other things. Why? Because modern philosophical thought began, from its very outset, to call for absolute freedom, aiming to fight against the constants which it regards as shackles. It is a grave mistake to reduce modernity to the matter of literature and poetry, but focus was placed upon this matter because it was the only and easiest gateway, the weak breach through which modernist thought could slip without causing uproar or attracting attention. Therefore, it was introduced through poetry and literature, which—being at the forefront—was subjected to numerous changes.

From the beginning, *Adonis* (today's theoretician of modernity) followed this plan; his doctoral dissertation was the gateway to modernity and to the dramatic upheaval in literature, which he titled *The Static and the Dynamic*. And since modernist thought is founded upon shifting as many constants as possible and making them subject to transformation, it was necessary to apply the modernist project through an entry point where it could flow smoothly and spread naturally. Poetry was the starting point: meter was considered a constant that had to be shaken, and rhyme a constant that had to be changed. Thus modernity exerted its influence upon Arab institutions (cultural, literary, academic...), encouraging the writing of poetry that disrupted the two constants of meter and rhyme. And since poetry is a legal term upon which certain rulings are based, modernity achieved its effect by erasing the distinctions between poetry and prose—distinctions that safeguard certain legal matters. This is precisely what Western modernity seeks.

Second: The Modernist Hermeneutical Reading

This reading was led by *Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd*, who called for reading the Qur'anic text through hermeneutical interpretation, which he borrowed from Germany and absorbed its ideas. In the West, this means: the science of interpreting and explaining the sacred text, or: “a set of rules and standards that the interpreter must follow to understand the religious text (the Bible).” He endeavored to apply this to the Qur'an. Yet it is known that such modernist methods were imported in incomplete form—and they themselves admitted this, as expressed in the well-known saying, “and a witness from among them testified.”

Jürgen Habermas, in his discussion of the rise of European modern philosophy and beyond, said: “*Modernity: an unfinished project*.” This was the title of a lecture he delivered in September 1980, which sparked wide controversy and continued to haunt him regarding modernity and post-modernity.

Abu Zayd's modernist reading appeared clearly in his book—banned in Egypt—*The Concept of the Text: A Study in Qur'anic Sciences*. This book was prohibited in Egypt, translated into Turkish, and spread across horizons. His modernist reading began with his claim of the “humanization” of the Qur'an: that it was originally a divine text, but upon reaching humans it became a human, earthly text. With this fabrication he arrived at a grave conclusion: that the Qur'an is nothing more than a linguistic text, but that Muslims surrounded it with a halo of sanctity and reverence. Abu Zayd asserted that “*the Qur'an is a linguistic text*”, then added, claiming: “*The search for the concept of 'text' is in reality nothing but a search for the essence and nature of the Qur'an as a linguistic text.*”

He further clarified this when speaking about isolating the Qur'an from its objective and historical context: “*...so that this isolation distances it from its original nature as a linguistic text, and transforms it into something possessing sanctity as a 'thing'.*”

Abu Zayd strongly attacked what he called “reactionary and Salafist forces,” accusing them of being the main reason for the backwardness and failure of pioneering intellectual projects. He failed to realize, however, that the

true cause of failure lay in the modernist projects themselves, for they began from the principle—so they claimed—of “rescuing” the Qur’an from the authority of references, and thereby making it an ordinary text (literary, human, or otherwise). Thus it would lose its sanctity and reverence in people’s hearts. Here lies the declared aim of his book: stripping the Qur’an of its sacredness and deepening the notion of its historicity, until he concluded that the Qur’an is nothing but a cultural product, subject to change with circumstances from age to age, and that the principle of abrogation within it is proof of annulment of rulings.

He ignored tradition and struck at its greatest treasure (the Qur’an), striving in his writings to twist its texts and words, in order to extract possible interpretations, applying the same methods the West applied to their distorted scriptures. Thus the Qur’an, for him, became a cultural product subject to textual deconstruction and interpretation.

Alongside him, his intellectual twin *Mohammed Arkoun* argued that the proper treatment of the Qur’an—so he claimed—must rely on the methods of the science of religions used in analyzing and critiquing traditions and the Gospels. For him, there is no difference between the Qur’an, the Gospel, and the Torah; all are “religious texts” that can be studied using modernist methods, applied linguistics, and the like.

Abu Zayd further argued in his book *Problems of Reading and Mechanisms of Interpretation* that affirming the divinity of the Qur’an and insisting upon it entails that humans, with their limited methods, are incapable of understanding it unless divine providence grants them the capacity to do so. In this, he excludes the possibility of comprehending God’s intent, asking in denial: “*Is it within human capacity, given their limitation and deficiency, to attain the divine intent in its perfection and absoluteness?*”

Thus, for him, the Qur’an was produced by the Arab reality (desert, Bedouin life...). He declared: “*To say that the text is a cultural product is in this case a self-evident matter that needs no proof. Nevertheless, in our culture it requires continual affirmation... But to say that the text is a cultural product represents, in the case of the Qur’an, the stage of formation and completion—after which the text itself became a producer of culture.*” In his view, these are two inseparable stages: once the first is admitted, the second inevitably follows.

He claimed that escaping the present crisis depends on the scientific renewal of tradition—a dazzling but deceptive stance, through which he introduced modernist Western methods that undermined Islamic intellectual, linguistic, and civilizational heritage. He said: “*...And if we cannot ignore this heritage nor erase it from our account, at the same time we cannot accept it as it is. Rather, we must reformulate it, discarding what is unsuitable for our era, affirming its positive aspects, renewing them, and expressing them in language fitting for our time. It is a renewal indispensable if we wish to overcome our present crisis, a renewal that combines authenticity with contemporaneity, linking the inherited with the acquired.*”

To summarize: the essence of Abu Zayd’s book is that the Qur’an is merely a linguistic text, and on this basis it should be judged. Our error, according to his claim, lies in turning the Qur’an into something possessing sanctity.

This perilous path which Abu Zayd embarked upon leads to denying revelation from God and denying prophethood and messengership of Muhammad ﷺ—an utterly false conclusion.

Third: The Rationalist (Epistemological) Modernist Reading

This reading is led by *Mohammed Abed al-Jabri*, who sparked its flame in his project on the Arab mind, explored through his writings along three axes: *The Structure of the Arab Mind*, *The Formation of the Arab Mind*, and *The Arab Political Mind*. He went far in these works, dividing the Arab mind into three essential components: *Bayān* (linguistic-discursive reasoning), *Burhān* (demonstrative reasoning), and *Irḥān* (gnostic-mystical reasoning).

He separated them, and claimed that the only scientific path to certainty was the demonstrative mind (*al-‘aql al-burhānī*). Into the discursive mind (*al-‘aql al-bayānī*) he placed the Islamic sciences and scholarly output, while the gnostic mind (*al-‘aql al-irḥānī*) he reduced to Sufism, Orientalist doctrines, and Gnosticism.

Upon examining critiques of his project, the following emerged: al-Jabri’s reading took a dangerous turn when he elevated the demonstrative mind to the level of the scientific mind, thereby making a sharp division between knowledge and revelation. This vision stems from a starkly secular outlook that sees no connection between politics (worldly affairs) and religion—religion being tied to *bayān* while worldly life depends on science and empirical facts. Moreover, al-Jabri merged in this vision elements of Marxism (in historical analysis) with the

thought of the German philosopher *Hegel*. Later we will encounter *Taha Abdurrahman's* responses to al-Jabri's project, in which he uniquely critiqued, refuted, and exposed the flaws in his divisions.

According to al-Jabri, the Arab mind is shaped by methodology and vision; thus his rationalist reading of the Qur'an is an epistemological one. He wrote in *An Introduction to the Qur'an*: *"The Qur'anic phenomenon, though in its essence a spiritual experience, prophecy, and message, is in its linguistic, social, and cultural belonging an Arab phenomenon. Therefore, we must not expect it to entirely depart from the realm of the Arabic language, neither in transmission nor in reception."*

This statement returns us to what Abu Zayd claimed earlier—that the Qur'an is a historical text, not valid for all times and places.

Al-Jabri's project occupies vast ground in research and studies, but what concerns us here is his reading of the Qur'an and his rationalist interpretations, as presented particularly in his book *An Introduction to the Qur'an*. After examining his readings of tradition and the Qur'an, the following stands out as the core of his rationalist-modernist views regarding the Qur'an:

- The compilation of the Qur'an involved confusion and disorder that led to the alteration of some of its texts.
- The Qur'an has a single purpose: guidance. As for its stories and parables, their intent is merely argumentation; thus, the stories of the prophets and messengers, and their call to worship God alone, are invalidated.
- Qur'anic narratives are treated as allegories.
- Reason and modern science are prioritized in interpreting the Qur'an's meanings, while searching for indications of its deficiency rather than its perfection.
- The Qur'an's miraculous nature is belittled by casting doubt on the authenticity of verses that establish it.

For example, in *An Introduction to the Qur'an*, he cast doubt upon the splitting of the moon for the Prophet ﷺ, saying of it and similar matters:

"These are issues which the early scholars and exegetes discussed, and opinions regarding them differ. They are all part of our heritage, and it is our right—indeed our duty—to select from them what does not conflict with the understanding that accords with reason and with the findings of science in our age."

On the matter of the Isra and Mi'raj, he introduced baseless doubt, affirming the Isra but denying the Mi'raj, claiming that *"the Mi'raj is not mentioned in the Qur'an, only the Isra is."* He further questioned the event by citing scholarly disagreement over whether it occurred in a dream or in wakefulness. He favored the view that it was a dream, presenting rational arguments to refute the belief that the Prophet ﷺ experienced it bodily and awake.

Yet the established view of reliable scholars is that the Isra occurred in wakefulness, with both body and soul. Al-Jabri, however, concluded his discussion by saying:

"The Isra and Mi'raj, if they occurred, occurred in the form of a dream. That is the opinion we choose among the views of earlier scholars."

Al-Jabri asserts in bold letters the claim of additions and omissions in the Qur'an, relying on dialectical levels he established, and on numerous reports he confirmed; thus, he arrived at statements regarding the Qur'an and its surahs, the purport of which is—for example, but not limited to—that Surah al-Tawbah retained about a quarter of it, that there were two surahs not written down, and that a verse about jihad was omitted... etc. What is stranger than these fabrications is when he affirms the distortion of the Qur'an by extremist Shi'a and their additions, and admits that "the possibility of the falling out of verses or surahs was more likely in the Meccan Qur'an than in the Medinan." He attributes this—claiming—to the harsh conditions that the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) experienced in Mecca before the Hijra. Yet, how could harsh circumstances be a reason for something to fall from the Qur'an? Unless it be abrogation; but abrogation is not the same as the omission that al-Jabri means.

From the words he presented at the end of the discussion on the subject of “additions and omissions in the Qur’an” is his justification for errors occurring in the process of its collection. He based this claim on the denial of infallibility for those who collected it. Finally, he states that these errors were corrected, but attributes the source of this correction to the unknown!! Al-Jabiri says: “It is possible that errors occurred when it was collected, during the time of Uthman or before that. Those who undertook this task were not infallible. Some deficiencies were corrected, as mentioned in our sources.”

The reading of Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri is based on two main perspectives: first, the historicity of the text; second, its rationality (that is, its epistemic reading). As for the first, it means linking it to the historical time, and this perspective appears in three components:

- The temporality of the message: meaning that the emergence of the Muhammadan message was the result of certain developments in Christian thought, namely, moving from trinitarianism to monotheism—as al-Jabiri sees it—and that the Christians the Qur’an spoke about were not trinitarians to begin with. Al-Jabiri tried to prove this expansion and continuity, and that the Qur’an was a continuation of what came before it and a natural extension of Christianity in its monotheistic form.
- The humanity of the Messenger ﷺ: subject to what befalls other humans.
- The relativity of the Qur’anic text: that it is not an absolute text, and this is shown through the issue of reasons for revelation and the matter of collecting the Qur’an.

As for the second, it is the rationality of the Qur’anic text, and its aspects appear for Abed al-Jabiri in his focus on the idea of secrets and mediators; meaning that all religions before the Muhammadan call had what was called a mediator between God Almighty and man, such as priests and monks. But Islam—in his claim—has no such secret, which implies for him that it is based on reason. Therefore, al-Jabiri rejects—based on his inverted idea—the existence of miracles in the life of the Prophet ﷺ, because the logic of reason does not accept them. And since the logic of life is the logic of habit, and a miracle is a departure from this habit, they were not acceptable to him. We already discussed the verses of the splitting of the moon, and the Night Journey and Ascension. Likewise, the matter of the opening of the Prophet’s chest ﷺ, al-Jabiri did not accept it, even though it is a well-known and famous narration; it was not acceptable logically and rationally, but the power of God Almighty is beyond what reason, logic, and habit can conceive. Among what proves the rationality of the Qur’anic text for al-Jabiri is his consideration of the Qur’an as an inseparable part of rationalist heritage.

At the end of the discussion about al-Jabiri’s reading, we found that he did not at all, in his book *Introduction to the Qur’an*, turn to investigating the definitive proofs that confirm that what is in our hands is the complete Qur’an that God intended, that it is His speech, exalted be He, and that it is preserved by God’s preservation until God inherits the earth and those upon it. Glory be to God, how understandings have gone astray, and minds have become bewildered!

Fourth: The ideological modernist reading.

This is a reading that views the Qur’anic text according to ideological need and societal intellectual necessity, giving precedence to reality and reason over the infallible texts of revelation. Leading this reading is the Egyptian Hassan Hanafi, who began by unifying all sciences in revelation, defining it in purely material terms, separating it from its Speaker, exalted be He, and attributing its knowledge and deduction to man. He said: “Revelation is an independent science in itself, deduced by man, who lays down its rules and principles. It is neither religious sciences nor worldly sciences. It is the science of the first principles upon which all sciences are based, and these are simultaneously rational, natural, experiential, and existential principles.” He claimed that the Qur’an is a series of living experiences that can be repeated in life. He used revelation in his reading as a purely material thing, not on the basis that it is from God Almighty, His speech, from Him it began and to Him it returns. He says in his book *From Creed to Revolution*: “We use here the term ‘revelation’ as a purely material thing, namely, what is recorded in a particular book, which is the Qur’an, and thus it exists. It needs no proof, and it is unlike the theory of prophethood.”

Hassan Hanafi sees that revelation is not a descent from God Almighty to man, but rather a response to the call of reality and an expression of the aspirations of the masses; that is, he calls for a new reading of the Qur’an, according to the requirements of human society and in response to its prevailing ideological need. In his view, “the five transmitted sciences—the sciences of Qur’an, Hadith, tafsir, sirah, and fiqh—are rebuilt, in order to drop the

old material that has become meaningless. As for tafsir, it too is rebuilt such that linear exegesis (surah by surah and verse by verse) is surpassed, as well as linguistic, literary, and jurisprudential exegeses... etc.” Hanafi’s approach thus did not differ from the approaches of Muhammad Shahrour, Muhammad Arkoun, or Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd in their view that calls for abandoning dependence on heritage and attacking it, because he considers it valueless, and calls for renewing and interpreting it entirely in accordance with the needs of the age.

Hassan Hanafi says in his book *Dialogue of Generations*: “The text at its beginning, including the Qur’anic text, is originally an ideological text, aiming to direct Arab reality and to dialogue with opponents in order to persuade them of the new ideological orientation. Even the fixation of the text in the dialect of Quraysh was an ideological orientation. Likewise, its use by all groups—mutakallimun, philosophers, Sufis, usulis—was ideological use. Even the demand for science itself is a counter-ideology: it is a scientific ideology against the prevailing ideologies of struggle: the ideology of authority and the ideology of opposition.”

In this respect, Hassan Hanafi has words about the revealed revelation and the wise Qur’an, that it is possible to dispense with it and there is no need for it, as long as reason holds the reins of determining good and evil. He says: “Transmission gives only hypotheses that can be verified in reason and validated in reality, as it gives intuitions that can be proven true by reason and validated by daily experiences. In the end, the criterion is reason and reality, reason alone is the means of communication, and reality alone is the common denominator that all people see. Rational inference and inductive statistics are the pillars of certainty.” And here is another of his statements that clarifies what he said: “Revelation is therefore based on reason. Reason is the basis of Sharia. Everything that reason deems good, Sharia deems good. Rather, reason had no need for Sharia, for man does not need revelation, and revelation is only God’s grace and kindness, which man may not need, since reason suffices him.”

“And revelation, insofar as it is words written in human language. We are not concerned with the writer, for the person is outside the scope of the question. Before us is only the speech, and the speech is written in a certain language, to which the rules of that language are applied in order to understand it. Indeed, sometimes speech is expressed in artistic form, that is, in pure human simile.” Thus Hassan Hanafi is not concerned with who spoke this revelation, and even supposing that there is none, what matters to him is the tangible, readable speech itself, which is a sensory material proof. He considers the speech to be God’s intent to man, but denies that it is an attribute of God’s essence. In this sense, the Qur’an for Hassan Hanafi is created—and herein lies the calamity!

This enumeration is not exhaustive of all modernist readings that subjected the Qur’an to criticism and study, but rather a survey of the most important of them. And even though these readings are evil, there are other contemporary modernist readings more evil still, which were passed over because they went to extremes in their renewal and committed crimes in their interpretation, such as the reading of Muhammad Shahrour, who dispensed with his haphazard mixing and confused interpretations of the Qur’an in place of the tafsir of Imam Ibn Kathir, may God have mercy on him.

The inferential bases of modernist readings of the Qur’an:

Contemporary readings and modernist interpretations that subjected the Qur’anic text to study and investigation originated from Orientalist roots, in numerous writings, and have had presence and influence up to today. These modernist readings relied—among other things—on two inferential foundations:

1. The linguistic method, with its different reading mechanisms in the language of the Qur’anic text.
2. The ethnological method. “Ethnology, or the science of races, sometimes called the science of racial cultures, is based on a systematic comparison of different cultures, following the historical method. It is also called cultural anthropology, or social anthropology, since culture is the product of society and the focus of its outputs.”

Modernist interpretations of the Qur’anic text agree on three principles, which Taha Abderrahmane mentions in his book *The Spirit of Modernity*, calling them “the schemes of modernist readings”:

1. The scheme of humanization: which essentially targets removing the barrier of sanctity [from the Qur’an], by eliminating terms of glorification and replacing established terms with new ones... etc.
2. The scheme of rationalization: which essentially targets removing the barrier of the unseen, by criticizing Qur’anic sciences, resorting to established methods in the sciences of religions, and releasing the authority of reason... etc.

3. The scheme of historicization: which essentially targets removing the barrier of legal authority, by obscuring the concept of rulership, reducing the number of legal verses, and generalizing the historical quality to creed... etc.

Taha Abderrahmane criticized these modernist readings, exposed their veils, revealed their flaws, refuted them, and followed them with dissection and evaluation, by writing and speech. He exhausted his effort in exposing the references from which they originated, because they sought to strip the Qur'an of sanctity, viewing it through its cultural, social, and historical dimension, without considering it as revelation spoken by God Almighty, accusing it of incompleteness—what Hassan Hanafi called “totality” and what Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri called the “distortion of the Qur'anic text.”

As for Tayyib Tizini, he denies that the Qur'an was complete, holding that it is possible something fell from it; that is, for modernist readers, the Qur'an is an incomplete text. Each of them, in his own way and according to his desire, tries to search for evidence supporting his proposition and claim. This is what Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri did when he presented bankrupt evidences to prove that the Qur'an is not complete, as in the matter of its collection, and his mention that Surah al-Tawbah is deficient, and so on. To conclude that the Qur'anic text is incomplete and unfinished—this is the crime of the scheme of humanization against the Qur'an, and the consequence of applying Western methods to the infallible revelation.

As for the scheme of rationalization, it worked on subjecting the Qur'anic text to the absolute authority of reason, by means of a set of methods from the sciences of religions and other linguistic sciences. Thus, their reason—with its worn-out logic—rejected, for example, the incident of the splitting of the moon, and modernist readers cast doubt on its narration, because their reason did not accept it, and what human reason does not accept is, for them, unacceptable.

As for the scheme of historicization, its content is subjecting the Qur'anic text to natural time, which leads to the conclusion that there are texts whose implementation can be suspended, and others that can be surpassed and disabled, because—in their claim—they were products of Arab nature and the pre-Islamic environment. For example, verses of rulings and the debate over inheritance, which they confine to a specific time, claiming they are tied to the nature of the pre-Islamic Arab society, and measured against it in time and place. Thus, in this description—which passed from Arab modernists—the Qur'an is incomplete, not a clarification of everything, and not valid for every time and place.

Following this pattern, modernists generalized skepticism across all levels of the Qur'anic text: “Since the habit of these modernist readers was to apply to the text different mechanisms not originally intended for it, unable to recalibrate them in their new context, they also applied to it the mechanism of doubt, claiming that the desire to uncover the unknown and see the hidden aspects of the Qur'anic text compels them to begin with doubt, on the pretext that it is the method that leads to discovery. But they hardly finish applying their different interpretations before they elevate this doubt to the rank of a universal law, and decide upon skepticism about the Qur'anic text itself, its sanctity, its completeness, and its validity.”

The interpretations of the modernists and their rationalist readings do not view the Qur'anic text as an open text for study, as much as they see it as a formidable obstacle, hindering the liberation of the Arab mind. Therefore, they strive earnestly to bring the Qur'an down from its lofty status, break its sanctity, and diminish its awe, so that—in their view—the Arab mind may be liberated, directed toward modernity and contemporaneity, severed from its binding references for understanding, and the Qur'anic text becomes then a text common to all. This is what Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd speaks of, praising it in his positions and opinions, that the Qur'an is a text born of its environment, a cultural phenomenon of a specific time and place, and that those who try to interpret it across the phenomenon of time and place, do so only for temporary social or class interests.

All these readings admit and agree that the Qur'anic text constitutes not so much a subject of study as it does an obstacle. They seek to liberate the Arab mind from it, to open it to modernity, so that it becomes a contemporary mind, conscious of its reality, living its concerns, aspiring to fulfill its hopes. These readings tried to apply modernist mechanisms, but they kept retreating backward, turning arrogantly away, because modernity and post-modernity are projects not yet complete—as their own proponents testified.

These modernist readings remained confined to intellectual seminars, bound to academic debates, distant from society and its reality. Why? Because they are not built on a solid scientific basis, nor on mature, complete production. Yet despite such frailty, they strive with persistent determination and tireless resolve to strike at the very foundation of the Islamic nation. For all modernists have learned that “every project to destroy a civilizational

structure begins with eliminating its founding text and annihilating its semantic features. Therefore, modernists, under the pretext of renewal, in their attempt to reread the Qur'anic text on the bases of modern Western philosophical and linguistic methodologies—after severing from interpretive heritage and starting from zero—are merely repeating the same work of the Orientalists, who directed their arrows at the Qur'anic text directly or indirectly by raising all kinds of doubts around it, and are perpetuating the same attempt to annihilate the semantic features of the founding text.”

Effects and consequences of modernist readings of the Qur'anic text:

There is no doubt that modernist readings and rationalist interpretations of the Qur'anic text have left a deep impact that gnaws slowly and corrupts continually in the consciousness and thought of the ummah, shaking many of its foundations, diminishing considerably the value of its sanctities, and dragging the language of the Qur'an down to the lowest levels. And that is only because of the negligence of some defenders and specialists in their fields of study directly related to the Qur'an and its sciences.

Here, we list some of the effects left by modernity, represented in contemporary readings of the Qur'anic text in particular, and in the consciousness and thought of the ummah in general:

- The spread of chaos in the religious and cultural axioms of faith, and the loss of sanctity from the Qur'an, as it became plundered by materialist Western atheistic methodologies, and by pretenders with glittering terms such as “literary” and “creative,” which conceal rebellion against sound creed and morals; to the point that some naive youth dared to criticize the Qur'an and Sunnah and their language, and freely disparaged the Islamic heritage.
- The creation of an epistemic rupture with Islamic heritage (represented by the sciences related to the Qur'an), through deceiving minds with the claim of not abandoning it (i.e., heritage), while applying the authority of modernist thought and its epistemic mechanisms upon it, in a way that provokes it, and calling for the necessity of thinking of it philosophically—so the deception passes, and heritage is gradually undermined at its foundation, step by step, stage by stage.
- Subjecting the Qur'an to rationalization and humanization, giving primacy to reason in determining good and evil. To achieve this, modernists first distorted the image of politics and governance in the land, creating a deep rift and a sense of alienation between the people and their political reality, pushing them to sever ties with the prevailing rule and its system, and with Islamic heritage in creed, law, morals, and dealings. By this pattern, they destabilized the sound, firm scales, and created a sweeping chaos that does not acknowledge the prohibitive rulings of Sharia in word or deed.
- Distorting the Arab literary and linguistic heritage, rebelling against it, and considering it an obstacle to progress and prosperity, whether by those affiliated with Islam, who displayed the garbage of modernist ideas of rationalism that rebelled against the authority of the Qur'anic text and the rulings of the Sharia, and preaching them. And liberation from every authority, even the authority of political rule, by creating what is called creative chaos, which brings nothing but loss and ruin, and regression in construction and development.
- Revolt against transmitted texts, acting according to reason to refute their arguments, and spreading doubt in what is certain and objective among them. Until people demanded what they are not entitled to in Sharia, and many women dared to challenge what is established in religion such as the issue of hijab, rulings on marriage, polygamy, and divorce.. And their argument in this is the suspicions of modernist thought, and its unjust disguises that obscured the truth and blinded its insight.
- The emergence of atheistic calls, and secular enlightenment ideas, such as the “death of God” with Nietzsche, and the praise of sects hostile to the Noble Qur'an and great Islam, such as the Batiniyya and Gnosticism.. and others.
- Creating comparisons between Islamic and Western civilizations, and striving for reconciliation and rapprochement between them, in order to eliminate the differences and particularities between the two civilizations, and unify them, so that particularity dissolves, the Islamic personality collapses, and the Arab identity sinks.

- The emergence of modern interpretations of the Noble Qur'an disconnected from its history, and cut off from its past and authenticity, and their meanings do not lead to the intended legal significations of the Wise Legislator, but on the contrary, they often collide with it; and that is only due to the infiltration of modernist thought into the halls of academic universities, and the adoption of modernist methodologies in research, theses, and official studies.
- The call for absolute freedom in letting anyone say whatever they wish about the Noble Qur'an, and considering that freedom of expression, and a step toward liberation in all fields, while it is nothing but a call to destroy the nation in its constants, beliefs, and rulings. And a fierce war against the Arabic language and Arabic literature, for everything—in modernity—is subject to change, subject to reordering anew, so curse their foolish plotting, and crush their hidden deceit.
- Falsifying legal terms in various sciences of the Islamic heritage, and reversing their realities in contradiction to their legal meanings; to suit modernist thought and its aim of change, removing sanctity from the sacred and desecrating it, and consequently displacing the issue of revelation from the Noble Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah, and severing the connection with the old traditional understanding of them; so that their aura of sanctity is lifted, and they become prey and open to falsification and false interpretation.
- Modern readings deceived many of the naive counted among Islam; until they diminished the scholars of Tafsir past and present, removed the obligatory character from the commands of the Book and Sunnah, and confined their function to preaching and morals, and the relationship between man and his worshipped, and that is all.
- And a prominent effect, visible to the eye, among the effects of modernity, its interpretations and its calamities on Islam and Arabism; is that it has become a veil worn by every assailant against religion, such as the masters of currents opposing it (like secularism, Marxism, Batiniyya...). So by mere affiliation with modernist thought, it becomes easy to criticize religion and what issues from it of beliefs, rulings, and unseen matters; until many youth stormed the Islamic heritage, and produced writings disparaging the Noble Qur'an and its sciences, under the cap of what is called modernity, culture, and renewal.
- The modernists' wares are not accepted unless clothed in the garment of religion; therefore they strive for reform and innovation dyed with the dye of religion, so that with the passage of time it becomes something of it. They believe that their modernist readings and the broadcasting of the spirit of modernity and its general character and embedding it in souls are not accepted unless placed in an attractive religious mold. In other words, modernity in heritage and the texts of the Noble Qur'an sells a cultural, philosophical product that is Western par excellence, and this product is not promoted nor invades markets except through religious propaganda and satanic seduction. Modernist readings of the Qur'anic text are nothing but a Westernizing call, and a revolution against the fundamental Islamic constants, working to exclude religion from social life, and this is the trick of modernity, which formed an imminent danger seeking to pounce on the constants of the Islamic nation and its sanctities in a religious guise and satanic skin.

Conclusion:

These readings raise various issues about the Qur'anic text, but they agree in being modernist products, belonging to shared intellectual visions, and are disconnected attempts (separated) from reality. And no matter how much these multiple approaches in modernist renewal of the Qur'anic text try, they do not succeed, and will not succeed, because they have not been able to convey their idea to the general people and the nation, and that is what we seek and hope from God to happen.

These readings that attempt to shed light on the Qur'anic text are not innocent, first of all, and then secondly, they establish modernist secular thought—whether they like it or not—that is applied through social, political, intellectual, and cultural models. They did not come from a void, but they will remain outside time and place, and will not reach their goal, because the Noble Qur'an is preserved by the care of God Almighty, and will remain so, and neither the interpretations of Arkoun, nor the rationalism of Al-Jabri, nor the rhetoric of Adonis, nor the ideology of Hanafi, nor the engineering of Shahrour and his insane reckless nonsense will affect the Qur'anic text.

The modernists and owners of modernist readings hide behind symbolic and ambiguous calls and labels, such as their claim: that modernist thought and renewal do not affect the contents of the Qur'anic texts, but study the formal literary structures within them, and the falsity of this deception and fraud appears by knowing the

foundations of Western modernist thought, issued from Marxist, existential, and Batini philosophies that explicitly contradict Islam. Modernist readings seek to revolt against the language of the Noble Qur'an, in order to explode it and change its rules and givens, and to create a new alternative language, in keeping with modern sciences, and then pounce upon old texts written in Arabic, foremost among them the Qur'anic texts, which they seek to remove from its scientific, jurisprudential, unseen, and sacred authority, until everyone dares to speak about the Noble Qur'an by his opinion, and the matter is indeed serious and not a jest, because the enemies of the Noble Qur'an plan night and day, in a dreadful way, and spend enormous sums of money in order to erase its effect, its ruling, its sanctity, and even to erase the reverence from its recitation.

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