

Modernist Approaches to Dealing with the Quranic Text: An Analytical and Critical Study

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Abstract

Modernist approaches deal with the Quranic texts from a perspective of modern analysis and interpretation, relying on literary and historical criticism methods. The objective of this approach is to understand the historical and cultural context of the texts and explore their literary and philosophical dimensions. Some believe that these approaches allow for a deeper and more diverse understanding of the Quran, while others argue that they may undermine the sanctity and religious authority of the texts. Modernist approaches seek to reinterpret the texts in ways that align with modern intellectual and scientific developments, which raises controversy about the acceptance of these interpretations in traditional religious circles. This research aims to clarify the correct approach to dealing with the Quranic text, criticize modernist approaches in dealing with the texts, and then explain the impact of modernity on contemporary Islamic reality and ways to confront it. This research employs a set of methodologies to achieve the desired objectives, including the inductive, descriptive, and analytical methods. One of the main findings of this research is that modernity is a Western concept based on freeing itself from the control of constants and beliefs, subjecting them to the dominance of reason in all areas of life. Modernists aim to sever the connection between the Quranic text and revelation, thus desacralizing it and making it an ordinary text. They also tried to disconnect the scholars of the Ummah from their heritage, abandon everything old, and even rebel against it. This research contributes to the community by helping researchers, scholars, and critics expose the modernist approaches prevalent in Islamic circles, revealing their falsehood, inconsistencies, and contradictions to the true religion.

Keywords: Approaches, Modernity, Dealing, Texts, Quran.

Contribution of the Research to Society

Modernist thought appeared among the Islamic community, and the emergence of this idea caused a problem among Muslims in understanding the Quranic text. This research helps the Islamic community in discovering the following matters:

- Understanding modernist thought well
- Avoiding modernist approaches in dealing with the Quranic text.
- Criticizing modernist approaches in dealing with texts.

Research Problem

The research problem lies in the following matters

- The spread of modernist interpretations among some Muslims without knowing their truth.
- The lack of clarity of the approaches used by modernists with the text in general.
- The lack of clarity of the approaches used by modernists with the Quranic text in particular.

Research objectives

- Clarifying the correct position for dealing with the Quranic text.
- Criticizing modernist approaches in dealing with texts.
- Clarifying the impact of modernity on contemporary Islamic reality and ways to confront it.

Research Methodology

In this research, I used a set of methods to achieve the desired goals, which are: the inductive, descriptive and analytical methods. I presented the views of modernists, analyzed them and linked them to each other to reach an objective unity and final results that achieve the research goals according to the established plan.

Definition of Modernity in Terminology

The researchers' definitions of the concept of modernity in terminology have multiplied and varied, and I will mention some of them to find common denominators between them; to come up with a comprehensive definition of it. By looking at these definitions, we find many common denominators between them, which are:

- 1- Comprehensive to all aspects of life, because it is a civilizational earthquake and a cognitive explosion.
- 2- Conflict with beliefs and constants.
- 3- Contrast with tradition, because it means a break with the past.
- 4- The dominance of reason over all matters, because it is their basis.
- 5- Linked to the West in its origins, because it was launched from it.

Based on the above, we can define it as: A Western term based on liberation from the control of constants and beliefs, and subjecting them to the dominance of reason in all areas of life (Awad, 2011).

Modernity in this sense is an absurd movement, calling for revolution against everything that is constant, whether it is matters of faith or otherwise, as there are no constants in it, but rather everything changes from one era to another, and each era has its own thought, belief, morals, and sanctities...etc.

As is clear from the previous definitions, modernity has made hostility to religion, undermining its sanctities, and degrading its status an authentic goal. The modernist writer

Khalida Saeed says in her article entitled: "The Intellectual Features of Modernity": The basic orientations of the thinkers of the twenties provide broad outlines that allow us to say: The true beginning of modernity, as a comprehensive intellectual movement, was launched at that time. The thought of the early pioneers represented a break with the religious and traditional reference as a criterion and the sole source of truth, and established two alternative references, reason and historical reality, both of which are humanistic and therefore evolutionary" (Saeed, 2015).

The Emergence of Modernity

Modernity - in its origin and emergence - is a Western intellectual doctrine, born and raised in the West, then moved from it to Muslim countries, as a result of the historical circumstances that Muslims suffered in the twentieth century, from the fall of their sovereignty, the colonization of their countries, and the successive intellectual defeats and military setbacks against them in front of the West. There is no doubt that the Arab modernists tried to find roots for their modernity in Islamic history on which to build the foundations of their thought as the West did, but they had no choice but to acknowledge the truth of the source The direction from which they actually derive their ideas.

"Confessions of this have been made by theorists of modernity; for example, Muhammad Barada writes an article entitled: "Theoretical Considerations for Defining the Concept of Modernity" in which he confirms that modernity is a concept fundamentally linked to Western civilization and its historical contexts and what its experiences have produced in various fields, and ultimately concludes that talk of Arab modernity is historically conditional on the existence of a prior Western modernity and the extension of channels of communication between the two cultures" (Barada, 1984)

Goals of Modernity

Modernity aims to abolish the sources of religion, and what it has issued in terms of doctrine and law, and to destroy all religious, moral and human values under the pretext that they are old and inherited to build life on licentiousness, chaos, ambiguity, illogicality, and animal instincts, in the name of freedom and access to the depths of life.

The truth is that these modernist readings are nothing but an attempt to repeat what the Orientalists presented in the past two centuries when they developed a method for criticizing the Holy Book in their view, so the modernists set out to try to imitate them in religious texts, especially the Holy Qur'an, to achieve similar results. Modernists' approaches to dealing with the Qur'anic text. Modernists tried to transform the Qur'anic text into a mere ordinary text disconnected from revelation and revelation. They also tried to create a break between the authentic interpretations of the Holy Qur'an and contemporary reality in order to sever the connection with the correct understanding inherited among the nation and its scholars in this regard. They rely on this by comparing the Qur'an to the Holy Book and not on a correct and reliable comparison. One of the researchers says: "The modernist reading seeks to present a reading that differs from the inherited reading to the point of declaring a break with the interpretations of the predecessors, which made its owners use in the reading process methods transferred from Western civilization, which are the same methods used in analyzing texts, whatever they may be, and at the forefront of them are Western theories in analyzing and criticizing texts, and theories of interpretation and reading without taking into account

the specificity of the Qur'anic text as a revelation" (Al-Najjar, 2006). The modernist Arab reading of the Qur'anic text sought to achieve an epistemological break with the traditional Islamic readings that work to consolidate faith and belief and replace it with the consolidation of skepticism and criticism. Among the most famous modernist critical readings is the reading of Muhammad Arkoun and his followers with Tunisians such as Abdul Majeed Al-Sharfi and Youssef Siddiq, as well as the reading of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid and Tayeb Tizini. Hassan Hanafi's interpretive reading falls under this category in a less severe way. These readings followed, in order to achieve their modernist critical project, a set of plans aimed at raising Belief barriers when dealing with the text (Ashour, 2011).

Modernists do not pay attention to the interpretations provided by our scholars throughout history, but rather jump over all of that, trying to use Western approaches and methods in dealing with the text. The following is an explanation and statement of the most important of these methods that they use in interpreting the Holy Quran, which are as follows:

Structuralism

Structuralism is the most famous term that appeared in the twentieth century, and began with the book of the Swiss linguist De Saussure: "Lessons in General Linguistics". This book dealt with the issue of structure, and the relationships that govern meaning through searching for those internal relationships. The impact of structuralism has extended to become a method in various scientific fields such as psychology, anthropology, and cultural history. The prominent role that Saussure played in defining this theory had an impact on its prevalence and spread in Western scientific circles, and in our Arab world.

Structuralism originally came as a method in literary criticism, to deal with the literary text through analysis and evaluation, "Structuralism is a methodological approach concerned with the relationships that govern meaning through searching for internal relationships, revealing them and analyzing them at their different levels: phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic" (Fatih, 2007). It is therefore a theoretical construction of things that allows for explaining their internal relationships and interpreting the mutual effect between these relationships... Any element of them can only be understood within the framework of its relationship to the overall system that gives it its place in consistency... The structuralist is a critic who analyzes the different structures of language and social phenomena; to rearrange them in a logical manner that ensures understanding their system, and extracts the mutual relationships between them, or the systems that govern them (Morshed, 2005).

Based on this approach, the analyst or interpreter of the text is the one who gives the sign or symbol a specific meaning through his understanding of the different contexts, and this places us before an esoteric interpretation that has no basis, and also opens the door to interpretation and diverting meanings from their reality under the pretext of a structural reading of the text. This is what modernists use in their dealings with the Qur'anic text.

Historicity

"Historicity" constituted the basic statement of the logic of Western thought and the central concept that it has used since the beginning of its renaissance in eliminating the control of religious heritage and establishing a new cognitive structure. Therefore, Arab modern thinkers are reviving this experience in dealing with the Islamic heritage to accomplish the

modernity project through the “law of historicity,” the renaissance logic on which modern Western thought was founded. Hashem Saleh says: “Exposing the historicity of what presented itself as above history is what constitutes the core of European modernity for two centuries and what has occupied Western philosophers from Kant to Hegel to Nietzsche... and still does” (Al-Abbasi, 2014).

He continues by saying that (the new vision of religion and the world can triumph over the old vision, even if it has been deeply rooted in the collective mentality for hundreds of years. But it will not triumph except after dismantling the old mentality and uprooting it by revealing its historicity and stripping it of its sanctity). (Al-Abbasi, 2014) Abdullah Laroui says in his description of the intellectual crisis and the crisis of society in the Arab world: (Intellectuals think according to two logics: the majority of them according to traditional thinking, and the rest according to selective thinking, and both trends lead to the deletion and denial of historical depth... We have said that the only way to get rid of both trends together is to submit to historical thought with all its components) (Laroui, 1974).

The historical concept is about connecting verses to the circumstances of their environment, time, and different contexts. This requires suspending the content of the texts and their requirements, and usurping the fruit of the ruling "erasing the wisdom". This meaning is reflected in the following texts: Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid says: "We will suffice here to stop at the very common and general levels of context such as the social cultural context, the external context (the context of communication), the internal context (the relationships of the parts), the linguistic context (the structure of the sentence and the relationships between the sentences). Finally, the context of reading or the context of interpretation." Al-Tayeb Al-Tizini says: “The overall, comprehensive nature in which the Qur’anic text appears in the formulation of its principles and most of its rulings, as well as in the style of its discourse, made it appear as a “book of guidance,” a “book of good news,” and a “book of mercy for the believers.” It is not a legal and educational book that contains every little and big thing, even in its time (Al-Abbasi, 2014).

It is clear from the above that historicity means subjecting the text to the influence of time, place, and addressee, which is the meaning around which all the theories of those influenced by Western thought revolve, who call for modern interpretations of the Book of God Almighty, and what is meant is to renounce the sanctity of the Holy Qur’an. Thus, they see that the time period in which the text was revealed is the most important reference in understanding that text. Its content requires connecting the Qur’anic verses to the circumstances of their environment, time, and different contexts, eliminating wisdom. It is weak from several aspects: First: The Holy Qur’an is not a book of a specific era or a book of one or more generations, and then its term ends. I mean that its rulings, commands, and prohibitions are not temporary. At a time and then it stops working. Rather, it is the book of all time. This was true for religions that are timed to a specific time, but Islam is the final message and Muhammad - may God bless him and grant him peace - is the final messenger, and the Qur’an is the last of the heavenly books and contains the guiding words of God. The Muslim must read the Qur’an with this spirit and this idea: it is the book of eternity, so we should not impose on it the culture of a certain era or force it to bear the ideas of a specific generation, because cultures evolve, ideas change, generations and eras pass, and the Book of God remains as God revealed it. The teachings contained in the Qur’an are permanent

teachings that will remain as long as life and humanity remain. It is not permissible under any circumstances for an arrogant person to claim that some of its rulings were specific to the era of its revelation - that is, the era of prophecy - or the era of the Companions or the early Islamic eras. Hence, we must stand with all our strength against those bold attempts against God that seek to deprive the Qur'an of the characteristic of eternity, and to give its rulings the character of timing, until we found those who reject the certainties of the Qur'an with their own delusions. The investigators of the principles of jurisprudence have said: The meaning is in the generality of the wording, not in the specificity of the reason. Verses were revealed that had reasons for revelation and they agreed to extend them to other reasons, such as the revelation of the verse of Zihar concerning Salamah ibn Sakhr, the verse of Li'an concerning Hilal ibn Umayya, and the punishment of slander against the archers of Aisha, then it extended to others.

Al-Zamakhshari said in Surat Al-Humazah: It is possible that the reason is specific and the threat is general to include everyone who engages in that ugly act and for that to be in the course of insinuation. Secondly: The idea of the temporal generality of texts at the level of meaning is absent from the minds of those who say that the Qur'anic text is historic. If the text is useful in its components at the level of emergence, making and occurrence, then the text itself tends to transcend at the level of meaning. The religious text itself emerges from reality to transcend it, and this text becomes free from any restriction or control in the process of its movement, especially if it is related to nature, I mean the nature of the person charged with it in what pertains to legislation or related to the transcendent meaning. This is when the topics of moral statements are such as benevolence, justice, obedience to parents, and the system of the relationship between husband and wife, and man and his fellow man. Or it is related to the transcendent conclusion if the text is related to history, such as the stories of the prophets, where the conclusion is the lesson when it escapes the captivity of time and place. (Surat Yusuf: 111) Hence, the Quranic texts are devoid of mentioning specific dates and times as is the case in the Torah, for example. If something is mentioned that appears to be restricted to place, time or society, which are components of the text as some have mentioned according to the structuralists and the proponents of the linguistic and linguistics method, then the metaphor as a linguistic and rhetorical phenomenon, whether it is a mental or verbal metaphor, is sufficient to lift the meaning from the captivity of the components of the signifier in the text (Al-Abbasi, 2014).

Deconstruction

Deconstruction represents a distinct case from other philosophical approaches. It is not a philosophy in the full sense, but rather a critical view and an open strategy subject to change and modification at any moment, unlike the concept of methodology, which is characterized by stability and constancy. In addition, it is a view free from all restrictions, its mission is to open the text without regard to any consideration, meaning that the text - any text - represents a special fabric, and must be dealt with as it is. This approach is also characterized by the lack of decisiveness in reading, as it is a hesitant reading that awaits the next reading, and so on. This hesitation makes the reader hesitant to accept any reading because it is not final and inconclusive; it casts a shadow of doubt on every reading. Because of doubt and hesitation, every reading becomes acceptable; because it does not carry the meaning of right or wrong. Transformation and change are the basis, as Ghassan Al-Sayed says: "The only basis that Derrida relied on in defining his deconstruction is instability, and it - that is,

deconstruction – in this sense eliminates the specific system, cancels adherence to a prescribed method, and drops the commitment to a legitimate framework that will be contradictory in origin and nature, because it imposes on it what is contrary to its moving and changing essence” (Ghassan, 2006).

A careful examination of these three advanced approaches will reveal that they agree on some of the main objectives between them. While structuralism attempts to give full opportunity to the effort in interpreting the text without referring to previous interpretations or relying on what God Almighty wanted through the context and precedence, we find that historicism also attempts to sever ties between the text and its rulings derived from it under the pretext that it is not suitable for our time but for the time and place in which it was revealed. It also severs the connection between the text and its rulings and its connection to contemporary reality. Deconstruction also comes to emphasize the same meaning, which is that there is no final interpretation of the text, and therefore there are no fixed rulings, and anyone can isolate the text from its context, precedence, history, and speaker in order to reach what he wants.

Mythological

Modernists claim that the Holy Quran is a mythical discourse like the Torah and the Bible. Arkoun says: “The biblical tales and the Quranic discourse are two wonderful examples of mythical expression” (Arkoun, 1996). Their claim is the same as that of the previous infidels and polytheists when they said, as the Quran mentioned about them: “And they said, ‘O Muhammad! We have indeed revealed to you the Book of Allah, and We have ... Among his boldness towards the Book of God Almighty is his statement in his introduction to the French translation of the meanings of the Holy Qur’an by Kazimirski - as reported by Abdul Razzaq Hermas - “The Qur’an is a cause for disgust with its irregular presentation, its unusual use of discourse, and its many mythological connotations” (Journal of Sharia and Islamic Studies, 1999). Among those who claimed that there are myths in the Qur’an, and that the stories of the prophets in the Qur’an are not true, but rather are mythological tales that may or may not be true, is Taha Hussein, when he said: “The Torah can tell us about Abraham and Ishmael, and the Qur’an can tell us about them as well, but the mention of these two names in the Torah and the Qur’an is not enough to prove their historical existence, let alone prove this story that tells us about the migration of Ishmael and Abraham to Mecca” (Hussein, 1926).

This is a denial of the words of God Almighty, narrating from Abraham: And when Abraham said, “My Lord, make this city one of peace and security and save me and my sons from worshipping idols.” (35) “My Lord, indeed they have led astray many among the people. So whoever follows me - indeed he is of me, and whoever disobeys me - indeed You are Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (36) “Our Lord, indeed I have settled some of my descendants in an uncultivated valley near Your House.” The forbidden, our Lord, that they may establish prayer. So make hearts among the people incline toward them and provide for them from the fruits that they may be grateful (37) (Surat Ibrahim: 35-37)

The idea of mythology directly attacks the Holy Quran, and even belies everything it contains. Therefore, it is a starting point for casting doubt on all established doctrinal constants. Hassan Hanafi says: “Doubting inherited beliefs is better than using reason to justify them” (Al-Shafi’i, 2008).

Dr. Nasr Abu Zaid: Speaking about his new awareness, and explaining his thought within the framework of the proposed approach for modern studies of Quranic texts (ascending dialectics): "It is an awareness that transfers culture as it transfers the citizen from one state to another, and from the stage of mythical, supernatural religious awareness to the stage of scientific awareness" (Abu Zaid, 1993). Everyone has called for a reconsideration of inherited beliefs because they contain irrational elements, in preparation for calling for their exclusion.

Humanism

Humanization aims to remove the obstacle of holiness from the Qur'anic text by dealing with the Qur'anic verses as a human situation. Abdul Majeed Al-Sharfi expressed this by removing the mythology from the religious text by trying to humanize it by secularizing the reading. This modernist reading adopted special operations, such as deleting the expressions of glorification that are common in Islam and replacing the historically established terms with new terms such as replacing the term "the revelation of the Qur'an" with the Qur'anic event, the Holy Qur'an with the great code, the verse with the phrase, citing divine speech and human speech on the same level in reasoning, and distinguishing between different levels in divine discourse such as distinguishing between revelation and revelation, the Qur'an and the Mushaf, and the oral and written. In this context, Muhammad Arkoun says, "I had shown in a number of previous studies that the concept of prophetic discourse applies to the texts collected in the books of the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the Qur'an as a concept that refers to the linguistic and semiotic structure of the texts, not to theological and doctrinal definitions and interpretations." Abu Zaid confirms this meaning by saying: "The claim that the texts are divine and the insistence on their divine nature necessitates that humans are incapable of understanding them with their methods unless divine providence intervenes by granting humans special energies that enable them to understand" (Ashour, 2011).

One of the results of the systematic application of the plan to humanize the Qur'an was to make the Qur'an a linguistic text that is no different from human texts. This linguistic similarity between the Qur'anic text and human texts resulted in considering the Qur'anic text as a mere text produced according to the cultural requirements to which the language belongs, and it cannot be understood or interpreted except by referring to the cultural field that produced it, as Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid emphasized by saying: "In the final analysis, religious texts are nothing but linguistic texts, meaning that they belong to a specific cultural structure that was produced according to the laws of that culture, of which language is the central semantic system." One of the results of the modernist reading is to make the Qur'an problematic so that the text becomes a summary that opens up to multiple possibilities and infinite interpretations. Tayeb Tizini believes that "the social situations identified in Arab society, including It included social, economic, political, cultural, etc. characteristics and demands, which intervened in the process of destabilizing the Qur'anic text, fragmenting it, and distributing it structurally and functionally in various class, factional, and ethnic nationalist directions. This came in a way in which this text appeared reconstructed according to multiple possible readings, the multiplicity of those directions and their carriers embodied in the situations mentioned above (Ashour, 2011).

Rationalization

One of the strategies followed in the modernist Arab reading is the plan to rationalize the Qur'anic text, which aims to remove the obstacle of the unseen. According to this reading,

the biggest obstacle is the belief that the Qur'an is a revelation that came from the unseen world. Therefore, it is necessary to deal with the Qur'anic verses according to modern methodologies and theories, as Arkoun sees it. One of the processes followed in order to achieve the plan to rationalize the Qur'anic text is to consider the Qur'anic sciences followed by Muslim scholars as fossilized cognitive media that prevent communication with the Qur'anic text and hinder the reasons for rational consideration. Hence, it was necessary to transfer the methods of religious sciences followed in analyzing and criticizing the Torah and the Gospels and apply them to the Qur'anic text, and to resort to the methods adopted in the sciences of man and society (Ashour, 2011).

Some of them added Hajj Douaq bin Hamna Al Bouafia, No cognitive method, whatever its nature, is free from ideological implications and cognitive objectives that it seeks to achieve, whether they are in line with the prevailing cognitive norm or conflict; and the method relies on a basic reference and subsidiary references, from which it derives its basic propositions, initial premises and ultimate goals. Then it - that is, the method - possesses tools that it employs in analysis, interpretation and reading, and in addressing all issues through premises and judging them through goals. All of this is done within a comprehensive cognitive strategy that contains ideological loyalties and theoretical biases that no scholar can escape from. These biases are translated into the form of theories based on methods that seek specific outcomes and end with comprehensive purposes, whether historical, political or cognitive. It is most likely that all methods end with cognitive purposes in appearance and ideological in essence. Among these approaches are the modernist approaches with the intention of dealing with the Islamic heritage, Islamic thought and reason, in a deconstructive and destructive manner, aiming to establish a newly emerging exploratory mind, which ends up destabilizing the cognitive system that emerged in the form of efforts in various fields of knowledge (theology, principles, jurisprudence, etc.) (Achour, 2011).

These are the most important approaches used by modernists in their dealings with the Qur'anic text, and as we have seen, they are intertwined and linked to the goals of modernity that preceded in the first section.

Conclusion

1. Modernity is a Western term based on liberation from the control of constants and beliefs, and subjecting them to the dominance of reason in all areas of life.
2. Modernists seek to sever the connection between the Qur'anic text and revelation, and thus strip it of its sanctity and make it an ordinary text.
3. Modernists severed the connection between the Holy Qur'an and the rulings derived from it in the modern era.
4. Modernists tried to sever the connection between the scholars of the nation and its heritage, and to abandon everything that is old and even revolt against it.
5. Modernists sought to re-publish the old ideas mentioned by Orientalists in the past two centuries in a new way, so their proposal was devoid of the modernity they claim.

Recommendations

1. Researchers, scholars and critics should expose the modernist approaches prevalent in Islamic circles, and reveal their falsehood, their weakness and their contradiction of the true religion.

2. Islamic institutions and those in authority in Islamic countries must confront these people and prevent them from taking the lead in the media and elsewhere.
3. The young generation must be raised with a sound and strong upbringing in all aspects of religion and life, so that they are not deceived by these people and their ideas.
4. We ask Allah to preserve our religion for us, to complete His blessings upon us, and to protect us from temptations, both apparent and hidden. And our final supplication is that all praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

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