

Reformism in the Context of Islamic Awakening

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Without trying to equate Islam with ideologies, claiming to be Islamic, we must not dismiss their mutual influence on each other. The presence, encounter, and conformity of religion with realities led to the emergence of many Islams in the ideological sense as opposed to jurisprudential and theological senses.

As a revivalist, Imam Khomeini (RA) was the founder of the contemporary Islamic Awakening. Only three decades after the victory of Islamic Revolution in Iran, his thoughts and ideas revolutionized the entire Middle East and North Africa.

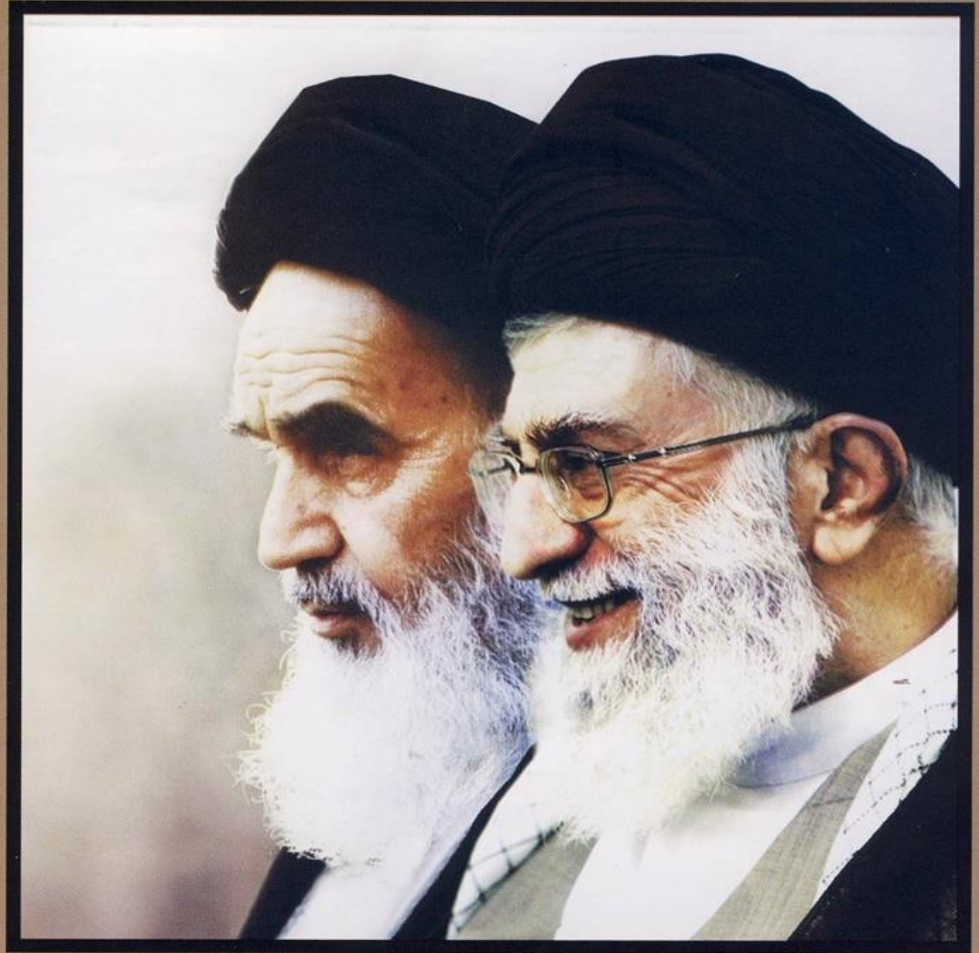
For over a century the religious reformist movement in Muslim countries has emphasized the point that we must first gather adequate knowledge of our times and conditions in which we live; or in short, follow the “fashion” of the day. Of course, religious reform has an unclear and ambiguous meaning, because various tendencies such as those inclined towards Socialism and Marxism as well as Islamist currents all claim religious reformism. But the revivalist movement has always emphasized on the “roots”, i.e. getting back to the original, genuine teachings of Islam to awaken the Muslims.

We must, therefore, study the contemporary religious reformism from different perspectives, which do not necessarily equate a “religious school of thought” with the specific meaning of “theology”. Abdullah Laruie, a Moroccan historian and scholar believes: The Islam that is talked about so much these days is a new Islam which is more a sociopolitical ideology than a religious science and theology. This is precisely the reason that Orientalists who only know the orthodox Islam, or tourists who are exposed only to the common man’s Islam encounter problems in understanding this new Islam.

The reformist and revivalist movements both seek change; the reason being that in the view of its advocates there has been a rupture between Muslim societies and Islamic principles. But, religious reformists, while accepting Islamic principles, analyze and criticize Western thought or thoughts and by borrowing from it are influenced by it, while the revivalists advocate return to the Islamic sources and using the experience of West when and where compatible with the teachings of Islam. In other words, the former tries to adjust

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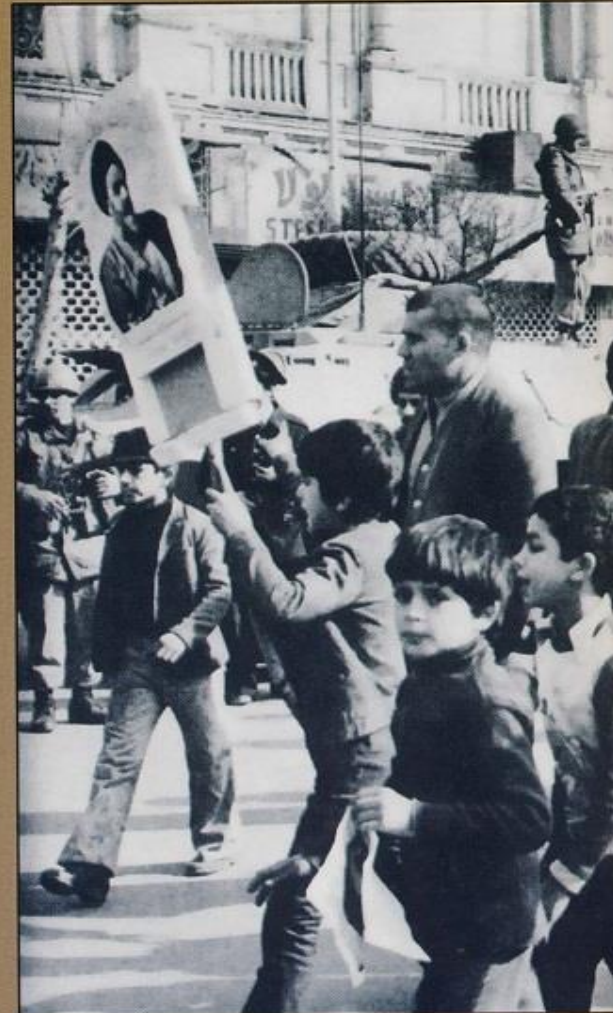
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Islam with the Western Ideas while the latter tries to adopt those parts of the Western thoughts and ideas which are compatible with Islam.

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Many political ideologies (whether reformist, revolutionary, liberal, socialist, etc.) claim being Islamic. Therefore, there are many varieties in this very reformism. Mohammad Arkoun, a noted philosopher and historian of thoughts, believes: Historians or sociologists do not disclaim or look over the existence of a central belief system among all Muslims, but scientists can not overlook the fact that various groups, cultures, and ethnic groups have tried to use Islam as one of the elements in identifying themselves and thus created in this way Indonesian, Pakistani, Turkish, Iranian, African,... Islams. Here, Islamic thought has yet to deal with an orthodox meaning of Islam, therefore more than ever before has concentrated on unity and the unifying forces of Islam. Modern criticism of various ideologies let it be proven that orthodoxy is an ideological requisitioning of the initial message the believers all want. This ideological requisitioning is done by a sociopolitical group. This matter (religious requisitioning of ideology) opens the theoretical argument with respect to the situation of religion and ideology (Arkoun, M., Islam et les Islams, Revue Hero-



dote, 1984, n 35, pp. 19-20).

Therefore, Islam appears in many faces. In other words, there are many reflections of Islam. The current movements in Muslim countries can be divided into two groups:

1 - The politico-Jurisprudential religious reformism (awakening).

2- The political-ideological religious reform. Representatives of this group offer views and carry out their activities out of any formal religious establishment (there are two streams: the extremist, fundamentalist currents and the moderate currents).

These two currents have brought forth some new matters which are fundamentally different from the customary sectarian differences.

But politico-jurisprudential

religious reformism advocates a multifaceted and comprehensive discourse whose aim is to Islamize the society and its various structures through implementing religious laws. The establishment of a religious government is considered as a jurisprudential necessity. Imam Khomeini(RA), as the theoretician of "Guardianship of Jurisprudent" represents this school of thought and is the founder of Islamic awakening whose waves have reached the Middle East and North Africa today. In the ideological- political reformism, though stress is laid on the holy Quran and the prophetic traditions, its stances are secular not jurisprudential. Reliance on sources and legitimization of political-social-economic structures are not a religious necessity, but a politicoideologi-

cal necessity.

The political-jurisprudential religious reformism wishes to Islamize modernist groups: the extremists wants to use Islam as an instrument to fight the West; while the moderate reformists want to modernize Islam.

When moderate reformists talk of reform or renaissance, we must bear in mind that they are leaving the religious sphere and get closer to the politico- cultural one, without shaking the religion or religious affairs which are necessarily a part of any renaissance or awakening. Reformers talk of renaissance so that they become modern and fashionable without having anything to do with the fundamentals of religion itself. At the same time the extremist reformers stick only to the superficial aspects of Islam and neglect



the core teachings. The moderates are trying to reconcile Islam with the Western thought without any critical analysis of the modern world which religion encounters today. Thus, they reconcile Islam with rationalism one day, and with socialism, Marxism and liberalism on another. Religious reformism has fostered more ideologues than raising innovative thinkers. These reformers assume more of a defensive posture towards modernism instead of formulizing a particular innovative social idea.

In the view of Shaygan, religious reformers believe:

There is nothing wrong with Islam, it is Muslims who have become corrupt. Islam is like an overcoat which has been put on inside-out, which if turned over, puts everything right...

They (ideological reformers) are well-informed about contemporary affairs but act on illusions and misinformation... They comprehend the decline and, at the same time, wish to progress and prevent those things which hinder this progress from marching ahead. They seek a shield from disasters. They think that problems emanate more from the institutions, which represent religion (Shayegan, D., *Le Mgard Mutile*, Paris, 1989, pp. 25-26).

The politico-ideological religious reformism does away with the sanctity of the hereditary and traditional Islam and its official institutions. Thus the religious approaches, manners and customs also change and undergo transformation. Whenever some institutions and activities gain their independence and give up

the tutelage of formal religious institutions and look for legitimacy inside these organizations and activities, they lose the sanctity they had assumed.

The politico-jurisprudential religious reformism or revivalism, led by Imam Khomeini and continued by Ayatollah Khomeini, lays emphasis on the Quran, genuine Islamic teachings and the prophetic traditions. It neither modernizes Islam nor Islamizes modernism. It maintains that there is a give-and-take interaction between Islam and epistemological achievements of mankind in any part of the world and in any historical stage. Hence, it advocates Islamicization of sociopolitical institutions by using those achievements of modernity which are compatible with Islamic teachings.