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**THE ARAB MODERNISTS OF THE LAST THREE
DECADES AND THE QUR'ANIC TEXT:
A CRITICAL STUDY**

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**DEPARTMENT OF AL-QUR'AN AND AL-HADITH
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**THIS DISSERTATION IS PRESENTED FOR THE
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Abstract

This study deliberates over the phenomenon of the growing interest of Arab modernists in the innovation of exegesis methodologies of the holy *Qur'ān* over the last three decades of the twentieth century, particularly, in the post 1967 Arab setback. To this end, the researcher set himself the task of answering the following methodological queries: What are the underlying reasons and motives that stand behind the dramatic shift of Arab Modernists during the last three decades; that is from being too apathetic to being very solicitous theorists who urge for the better comprehension of the holy Qur'an? What is the extent of scientism and realism in their claims? What are their methodological alternatives, and plausibility in the comprehension of *al-Qur'ān*? To what extent had these methodologies enabled them to present the intellectual, theological and legislative alternative that does not impair what is legally decisive nor contravene the spirit and objectives of the *sharī'ah*.

Answering the above questions led the researcher to arrive at the following realities: The vested interest of the modernists in religion is nothing more than casual interest dictated by the factual circumstances and the political and intellectual bickerings against the mushrooming religious current. There is a very conspicuous enmity on the part of the modernists towards the Islamic Orthodox methodology of exegesis, though such antagonism does not stem from clear scientific convictions, but rather it originates from intellectual bigotry, civilizational uprooting and composite ignorance about Islam and its methodologies. What, so far, have been presented by Arab modernists as viable and plausible methodologies are, virtually, just imported ideological conceptions, scattered epistemic fragments that contravene the simplest axioms of Islamic theology. It can, under no circumstances, be regarded as an alternative methodology in the understanding of the holy *Qur'ān*. Indeed, the modernist theological, intellectual, jurisprudential and legislative exegeses are distorted interpretations, which are worlds apart from the spirit and maxims of Islam, and they are, thereby, a damning evidence of the moral derailment, and the intellectual and civilizational deracination of their authors.

The researcher concludes with the following suggestions: to persistently monitor and examine this phenomenon from different perspectives; observing the repercussions of this phenomenon on Islamic thought, in general, and the exegesis field, in particular; holding conferences, symposiums, and setting up specialized research centers designed to thoroughly examine this phenomenon; developing the *Qur'ānic* studies, and raising their level of analysis in a way that suits the contemporary needs, but which abides by the following restraints: observing the core fundamentals of Islam, knowing *Turāth* (Islamic legacy), and having an adequate acquaintance with the contemporary methodologies.

Abstrak

Kajian ini membincangkan fenomena perkembangan minat di kalangan pendukung pemodenan (modernis) Arab dalam memperbaharui metodologi-metodologi terjemahan (tafsir) *al-Qur'ān* pada tiga dekad terakhir kurun kedua puluh, terutamanya, selepas kemunduran Arab pada tahun 1967. Untuk mencapai matlamat ini, pengkaji meletakkan dirinya untuk menjawab persoalan-persoalan metodologi berikut: Apakah alasan-alasan dasar dan motif-motif di sebalik perubahan dramatik pendukung pemodenan Arab sepanjang tiga dekad terakhir itu; iaitu daripada menjadi ahli teori yang apatetik kepada ahli teori yang terlalu berhasrat besar untuk lebih memahami *al-Qur'ān*? Apakah tahap saintisme dan realisme dalam dakwaan-dakwaan mereka? Apakah metodologi alternatif dan logic mereka dalam memahami *al-Qur'ān*? Sejauh manakah metodologi-metodologi ini mampu mempersembahkan alternatif-alternatif intelektual, ketuhanan dan perundangan mereka dengan tidak merosakkan apa yang sah menurut hukum atau bercanggah dengan semangat dan objektif *sharī'ah*?

Menjawab persoalan-persoalan di atas, pengkaji telah terarah untuk membuat kesimpulan bersama realiti berikut: Minat yang teguh bagi pendukung pemodenan terhadap agama adalah kosong tetapi cuma satu minat kasual terarah oleh keadaan nyata dan perselisihan politik serta intelektual dalam menentang arus perkembangan pesat aliran agama. Suatu kebencian yang ketara daripada pihak pendukung pemodenan terhadap metodologi penafsiran Islam yang ortodoks, walaupun kebencian itu tidak berpunca daripada kepercayaan saintifik yang jelas, tetapi ianya berasal daripada kefanatikan intelek, mencabut akar-akar peradaban dan paduan kejahilan mengenai Islam dan metodologinya. Sehingga kini, apa yang telah dipersembahkan oleh pendukung pemodenan Arab sebagai suatu metodologi yang praktikal dan munasabah ialah, pada hakikatnya, cuma konsep-konsep ideologi yang di import, serpihan kajian epistemik yang bertaburan yang bertentangan dengan prinsip yang paling mudah dalam ilmu ketuhanan Islam, dan ia tidak boleh, dalam keadaan apa sekalipun, dianggap sebagai suatu metodologi alternatif dalam memahami *al-Qur'ān*. Sesungguhnya, tafsiran ilmu ketuhanan, intelektual, hukum dan perundangan oleh pendukung pemodenan ialah tafsiran yang menyimpang, yang datang keseluruhannya dalam jurang pemisah yang luas dengan semangat dan objektif Islam, dan mereka, dengan demikian, merupakan suatu bukti yang merosakkan bagi penggelinciran moral, pencabulan intelek dan peradaban penulisnya.

Pengkaji menggulung dengan mengengahkan cadangan-cadangan berikut: Untuk terus-menerus mengawasi dan memeriksa fenomena ini daripada pelbagai pandangan; meninjau akibat tidak langsung fenomena ini ke atas pemikiran Islam, secara amnya, dan bidang tafsir, secara khususnya; mengadakan persidangan, simposium, dan mewujudkan pusat kajian khusus bertujuan untuk memantau sepenuhnya fenomena ini; memperbaharui pengajian *al-Qur'ān*, dan meninggikan taraf analisisnya dengan cara yang bertepatan dengan kehendak-kehendak semasa, tetapi ini hendaklah menepati sekatan-sekatan berikut iaitu: pemerhatian terhadap prinsip asas Islam, mengetahui *Turāth* (warisan Islam), dan mempunyai pengetahuan yang mencukupi tentang metodologi-metodologi semasa.

ملخص البحث

اعتنى البحث بدراسة ظاهرة اهتمام الحدائين العرب المتزايد بالقرآن الكريم وتجديد مناهج تفسيره في العقود الثلاثة المتبقية من القرن العشرين وبالتحديد بعد نكسة 1967 وقد كان ذلك من خلال الإجابة عن أسئلة محددة قدر الباحث أنما تؤدي إلى تفسير الظاهرة وتقييمها وهذه الأسئلة هي: ما هي الدوافع والعوامل الكامنة خلف تحول الحدائين العرب خلال العقود الثلاثة الماضية من خصوم وزاهدين في القرآن الكريم إلى دعاة لتجديد فهمه ومنظرين؟ ما هي مبرراتهم في التخلي عن المناهج التفسيرية المعهودة في فهم القرآن الكريم؟ وما مدى علميتها وواقعيتها؟ ما هي بدائلهم المنهجية وما مدى أصالتها وانسجامها الداخلي وأحقيتها بفهم القرآن الكريم؟ إلى أي مدى أسعفتهم هذه المناهج في تقديم البديل الفكري والعقدي والتشريعي الذي لا يتعارض مع ما هو معلوم من الدين بالضرورة ولا مع روح الشريعة ومقاصدها؟

وقد أدت الإجابة عن هذه الأسئلة إلى النتائج التالية: أن اهتمام الحدائين بالدين لا يعدو أن يكون مجرد اهتمام أمثلته الظروف الواقعية والصراعات الفكرية والسياسية ضد التيار الديني المتنامي. عداء الحدائين الواضح لمناهج التفسير الإسلامي غير أن هذا العداوة لا يصدر عن قناعات علمية واضحة بل عن تعصب فكري وانبئات حضاري وجهل مركب بالإسلام ومناهجه. أن ما يقدمه الحدائون على أنه مناهج لا يعدو أن يكون مجرد تصورات أيديولوجية مستوردة وأشياء معرفية متناثرة تتعارض مع بديهيات العقيدة الإسلامية ولا يمكن بحال جعلها منهج بديل في فهم القرآن الكريم. إن التفاسير الحدائية العقدية والفكرية والفقهية والتشريعية هي تفاسير منحرفة بعيدة كل البعد عن روح الإسلام ومبادئه، ولا تدل إلا على انحراف أصحابها الأخلاقي وانبئاتهم الفكري والحضاري.

وقد خلص الباحث بعد ذلك بتوجيهات ومقترحات يمكن إجمالها في الآتي: مواصلة رصد هذه الظاهرة نفسها وتعميق البحث حولها. رصد آثار هذه الظاهرة على الفكر الإسلامي عموما وعلى المجال التفسيري خصوصا. إقامة مؤتمرات ومراكز بحوث متخصصة تعنى بدراسة هذه الظاهرة دراسة واعية وهادفة. تجديد الدراسات القرآنية وتعميقها والارتقاء بها إلى ما يتناسب وحاجيات العصر وذلك ضمن الضوابط التالية: احترام الثوابت ومعرفة التراث والاطلاع على المناهج المعاصرة.

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Finally, I would like to thank my wife and children for their understanding and patience.

TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION FONTS

Arabic alphabets	Name and Transcription
ء , ا	a , ' (hamzah)
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	h
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	‘
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
و	w
ة	h
ي	y
Long Vocal	
آ	ā
وا	ū
ئي	ī

Short Vocal

fathah
ḍammah
kasrah

a
u
i

Diftong

او
ای

aw
ay

GLOSSARY¹

Ḥādīth	Prophetic saying, The authentic definition, as stated in the seminal books of ḥādīth, is: “What had been associated with the prophet as a saying, act, affirmation, or attribute”.
‘Ām	Year based on moon counting
‘Aṣābiyah	Tribal solidarity
‘Ulamā’	Islamic scholars
‘Ummah	Muslim nations
‘Uṣṭūrah	Myth
‘Akhḷāq	Ethics
‘Athar	Trace
‘Īmā’	Female slaves
‘Īmān	Faith, belief
‘Ibḥfīs	Satan
‘Idrāk	Apprehension
‘Iḥtijāj	Pleading
‘Ijtihād	Personal legal reasoning, renovation
‘Ikhtilāf	Association of both genders
‘In‘ām	Benefit
A.H.	After Hijrah
al-‘Urf	The traditional legislation
al-Kalālah	To have a distant heir
al-Ladhī	Who, which, that
al-Mashā‘ah	The individual is totally absorbed in the society.
al-Nisā’	Women
al-Risālah	The message of the Prophet
al-Sabīl	Path
al-Shām	Now consisting of Palestine, Syria and Lebanon
Al-Sunnah	Prophetic Tradition
al-Ṭarīq	Way
al-Taḥliyah	Filling up process
al-Takhliyah	Clearing out process
al-Tashrī‘	Islamic legislation
Bābiliyyīn	Babylonians
Dawābit	The regulating standards
Ḥaj	Pilgrimage

¹ Some of these definitions vary according to the context.

Ḥijāb	Veil, Islamic woman attire
Ḥirmān	Deprivation
Ḥudūd	Penalties
Ḥadīth 'Aḥād	Ḥadīth reported merely by one narrator
Ḥarābah	Banditry
Jamā'ah	Community
Rasūl	Messenger
Jihād	Sacred war
Khulwah	Private meeting of man and woman
Kufr	Infidelity
Madār	Orbit
Ma'ūl	The direct object
Maḥram	Unmarriageable person
Mushrikīn	Pagans
Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh	Abrogator and abrogated texts
Naskh	Legal abrogation of the text
Nubuwwah	Prophethood
Qawā'id	Rules
Qiyās	Analogy
Rā'in	Guardians
Ri'āyah	Care and responsibility
Ribā	Usury, taking interest
Riwayāt	Legal reports
Ṣaḥābah	Prophet's companions
Ṣaḥābī	A prophet's companion
Ṣaḥarah	Desert
Ṣalāt	Prayer
Sanah	Year based on sun counting
Sariqah	Theft
Shaklāniyyah	Manifestation of the formalities
Sūrah	Chapter of the Qur'ān
Sujūd	Prostration
Ta'zīr	Chiding
Tāba	Repent
Tafsīr	Islamic interpretation, exegesis
Tasannah	Rotted
Tasbīḥ	Glorification of Allah, to free (Tanzīh) almighty Allah from all ill-attributes.
Taskhīr	Serviceability
Tawātur	Ḥadīth which had all been unanimously reported by successive groups of narrators, recurrence, succession
Tawbah	Repentance
Tawḥīd	Monotheism
Tūfān	Flood
Tuqyah	Concealing one's belief

Turāth

Legal legacy, legacy, tradition, past Islamic heritage, traditional and jurisprudential heritage

Zulmihi

His transgression

Zakāt

Giving alms

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