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“Methodological Flaws in Modernist Criticism of the Qur’anic Text” -An Inductive Critical Study-

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Abstract

The Holy Qur’an is one of the Islamic sacred texts that has been subjected to criticism by Orientalists and modernists, who have engaged in questioning and disputing its authority in an attempt to undermine its greatness, diminish the sacredness of its text, and shake Muslims’ faith in their religious fundamentals. In doing so, they have taken advantage of the civilizational decline of the Muslim nation and the fascination with which contemporary Western critical approaches have been received within Muslim societies across various fields and disciplines.

The “modernist approach” is one of those critical approaches that has recently been employed in the interpretation of the Qur’anic text, despite the apparent objectives of its proponents, the flaws in their methodology, the weakness of their ideas and arguments, and the superficiality of their theoretical foundations. Whether we accept it or not, this approach has today become a prominent current in the field of literary studies in general and Qur’anic studies in particular. It represents a new form of Orientalist studies, as Orientalists and modernists may be regarded as two sides of the same coin, given the similarities between their approaches and the convergence of their objectives.

To uncover the underlying aspects and true nature of this approach, the present study is entitled: “Methodological Flaws in Modernist Criticism of the Qur’anic Text – An Inductive Critical Study.” It seeks to investigate the origins of modernist thought and the objectives pursued by its proponents through its application to Qur’anic studies. The study then examines the mechanisms they employ in criticizing the Qur’an and the contradictions in their treatment of transmitted evidence, particularly in the absence of a clear methodology and their evident arbitrary use of reason when dealing with the Qur’anic text. Finally, it highlights their particular interest in coining polarizing terminology to promote and establish their approach.

Keywords: Modernist Criticism, Qur’anic Studies, Methodological Flaws, Orientalism, Textual Criticism, Hermeneutics

+931- Introduction:

The Islamic scholarly heritage in general, and the Holy Qur’an in particular, has been among the targets of the poisoned arrows of both the Orientalist trend and the modernist current. Their aim has been to sow weakness in the hearts of Muslims, instill feelings of backwardness and frailty within them, undermine their beliefs, and destroy their sacred foundations. In doing so, they have sought to distort the image of their history and exaggerate the status of the West and its scholarly achievements and methodologies.

The Holy Qur’an is likewise one of the Islamic sacred texts that has been subjected to criticism by Orientalists and modernists, who have questioned and disputed its authority in an attempt to undermine its greatness, diminish the sacredness of its text, and shake Muslims’ faith in their Qur’an. In doing so, they have taken advantage of the growing penetration and fascination with which their various contemporary Western critical approaches have been received throughout the Islamic world and across different fields and disciplines.

Among the critical approaches employed in interpreting the Qur’anic text and in imparting a critical and interpretive character to the process of exegesis is the modernist approach, or what has been referred to as the “modern means of penetration.” The latter has become a widely circulated intellectual commodity among many who are regarded as belonging to the Islamic sphere, such as Muhammad Shahrur, Muhammad Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and others who have carried the banner and advocated this approach in the Islamic world. They thus became, in effect, the leading figures of Western missions and agents in importing this Western approach into Muslim lands.

In light of the foregoing discussion concerning some of the intellectual backgrounds and genuine objectives of the proponents of this approach, a close examination of what they have written about and around the Holy Qur’an reveals

methodological transgressions and arbitrary, tendentious applications that are incompatible with the principles of scholarly research. This prompts us to examine these arbitrary practices, clarify these transgressions, and highlight the methodological flaws involved in applying the modernist approach to the Qur'anic text or, more accurately, in criticizing it. Accordingly, I have chosen the following title for this article: "Methodological Flaws in Modernist Criticism of the Qur'anic Text – An Inductive Critical Study –", through which I examine the following:

- 1- The origins and objectives of modernist thought.
- 2- The terminology employed by modernists.
- 3- The absence of a clear methodology in modernist criticism of the Holy Qur'an.
- 4- The modernists' position regarding transmitted evidence.
- 5- The status of reason among modernists, their mechanisms for criticizing the Holy Qur'an, and a critique of those mechanisms.

1- The Origins and Objectives of Modernist Thought

A- The Origins of Modernist Thought:

The phenomenon of criticism, both in the past and in the present, is regarded as one of the most important effective mechanisms and means for evaluating and refining scholarly outputs in general and literary works in particular. It constitutes an important stage in the development, dissemination, and transmission of knowledge, ensuring that it remains free from shortcomings, defects, and flaws. The manifestations of this approach can be traced back to the earliest beginnings of rhetorical criticism among the Arabs, particularly in the work of al-Nābighah al-Dhubayānī. He used to evaluate and refine the poetry of poets in his red tent, which was erected for him at the 'Ukāz market. Al-Nābighah of Banū Dhubyān served as an arbiter of poetry, and a tent made of leather was erected for him at the 'Ukāz market, where poets would gather before him. One example of al-Nābighah's critical evaluation and refinement is the occasion when Ḥassān ibn Thābit came to him while al-A'shā was there, and the latter recited his poetry. Then al-Khansā' arrived and recited a poem beginning with:

"Is it an ailment in your eye, or a pain within it,
or have your tears flowed when the house was left empty of its people?"

Until she reached:

"Indeed, Sakhr is one whom those seeking guidance follow,
and indeed, Sakhr is our master and our lord,
as though he were a beacon with a fire burning atop it.
And indeed, Sakhr, when winter comes, is a great slaughterer."

Al-Nābighah said: "Had Abū Baṣīr (meaning al-A'shā) not recited to me before you, I would have said that you are the finest poet among all people. By God, you are a better poet than every woman!" Al-Khansā' replied: "And better than every man." Ḥassān then said: "By God, I am a better poet than both you and her." Al-Nābighah asked: "In what do you say this?" He replied, referring to the following verses:

"We have the gleaming bowls that shine in the daylight,
and our swords drip blood from our acts of valor.
We have fathered the sons of al-'Anqā' and the two sons of Muḥarriq;
how noble are we as maternal uncles, and how noble are we as fathers!"

The meaning of these two verses is that Ḥassān boasts of his Yemeni people and their generosity. They possess large bowls large vessels for food which are set out at midday so that people may eat from them. At the same time, they are brave, and their swords drip with blood because of the many acts of valor they perform on behalf of others. He then boasts that they are related to the two groups, Banū al-'Anqā' and the two sons of Muḥarriq, saying: how noble we are as maternal uncles, and how noble we are as fathers! The word "ibnamā" means "son," and the addition of "mā" to it is permissible.

Al-Nābighah then said: "Indeed, you are a poet, had you not reduced the number of your bowls and boasted of those whom you fathered rather than those who fathered you." According to another account, he said to him: "You said al-jafanāt [the bowls], thereby reducing their number; had you said al-jifān [the bowls], the number would have been greater. You said 'they shine in the daylight'; had you said 'they sparkle in the darkness of night', that would have been more eloquent in praise, because guests are more likely to arrive at night. You said 'they drip blood from acts of valor', thereby indicating a small amount of killing; had you said 'they flow', it would have suggested a greater abundance of blood. And you boasted of those whom you fathered rather than those who fathered you." Ḥassān then rose from the gathering humiliated and defeated.

Al-Nābighah's criticism was clearly artistic in nature. He pointed out that Ḥassān had not succeeded in choosing the appropriate words that should convey meanings of abundance and exaggeration. He also criticized him on the level of meaning, namely, for boasting of his sons rather than his forefathers. Among the Arabs, it was customary for a person to take pride in his forefathers and leave his children to take pride in him. This represents an example of the origins of literary criticism (Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, p. 384/09).

Literary criticism today in Western countries is based on numerous theories, including the theory of the death of the author, or the exclusion of the writer and the circumstances surrounding the emergence of the text. Within this framework, the critic's role is comparable to that of a key to understanding the text, independently of any intellectual or ideological background. This is achieved through rigorous analysis, bringing to light the secrets of the text and revealing its hidden meanings and imagery, thereby making it clearer to the reader and enhancing its beauty, magnificence, and aesthetic

appeal in the reader's perception and sensibility. At the same time, there is an attempt to transfer the text from its original historical period into the reader's own time, so that it does not become detached from its environment and literature is not deprived of its authentic taste and rich historical character.

The term "literary criticism" is also a product of the twentieth century, resulting from the influence of the Arab intellect by an intellectual trend that had become widespread in Europe. The modern concept of criticism emerged and developed in Europe, specifically in Italy during the sixteenth century, and later in France and Germany during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively. Thus, "the term literary criticism is new to the Arab intellectual scene; our language did not know it until the modern period, following contact with the West" (Al-Kawwāz, 2006, p. 57).

In explaining the distinction between ancient and modern criticism, Al-Kawwāz states: "It appears that the period in which we began to recognize the new term dates back to the twentieth century. There is no doubt that there are fundamental differences between the old term and the modern one, arising from the nature of each. Modern criticism has a broader scope and encompasses more elements of literature. It is also more deeply rooted in multiple cultures and diverse forms of knowledge. It is a criticism of trends and philosophies that ultimately develops into critical schools and necessitates research into the philosophy of literature, its objectives, sources, functions in life, aesthetic characteristics, artistic principles, and distinctive originality. Ancient criticism, by contrast, was, in most cases, a criticism of particulars: it concerned itself with one or two lines of poetry rather than the poem as a whole. It often neglected the explanation and analysis of the judgments it issued, and its judgments were frequently influenced by religious, sectarian, or tribal positions" (Al-Kawwāz, 2006, p. 58).

The beginnings of modern criticism in Europe were based on the study and engagement with Greek heritage, with the aim of overcoming traditional modes of thought, freeing the mind from intellectual stagnation, and breaking away from the Church's domination over all aspects and spheres of life. This gave rise to numerous critical currents, including the scientific and philosophical currents: "The scholar was no longer satisfied with linguistic meanings, grammatical subtleties, and rhetorical images in words and structures. Rather, criticism moved beyond these to a broad and profound approach that regarded literature as the natural product of two things: the environment and the writer. By 'environment' is meant all that it encompasses, including the natural, industrial, political, social, scientific, and artistic influences available to a people in a particular age, which constituted the literary factors and the fertile soil in which literature could mature and writers could flourish" (Karolī and Fīllū, 1984, p. 55).

The literary critical scene in Muslim countries was influenced by the outcomes of the European Renaissance in the field of criticism. This can be attributed to two principal factors:

A- Influence by Orientalist thought.

B- Influence by Western campaigns against Muslim lands.

A- Influence by Orientalist Thought:

The scope of criticism eventually extended to one of the greatest sacred foundations of Islam, namely, the Holy Qur'an. Western critical approaches entered Muslim lands through a group of importers who had been influenced by their secular and materialist intellectual formation. In this regard, Hisham Sharabi states: "Whether we like it or not, this secular critical thought derives its concepts, terminology, and dimensions from the European experience of modernity in its comprehensive sense" (Hisham Sharabi, p. 23).

Hashim Salih states in a footnote to his translation of Arkoun's work: "Here, Arkoun attacks, in a polite and concise manner but also with a degree of sarcasm the Orientalists and scholars of Islamic studies who reject the application of modern Western methodologies that emerged after 1950 to Islam, even though these methodologies are applied in particularly useful and productive ways to Western societies and cultures" (Muhammad Arkoun, 2005, p. 79).

B- Influence of Western Campaigns against Muslim Lands

The European invasion of Muslim lands also led some Muslims to become convinced that it was necessary to revolt against everything religious in order to attain and reach the level achieved by the Europeans, believing that religion was the obstacle and barrier standing between the Muslim nation and progress. In this regard, Al-Sharafi states: "Because religion was deeply rooted in society, any attempt to save that society appeared impossible unless religion itself was employed for this purpose, either by interpreting it in a manner compatible with the requirements of the new political and social struggle, or at least by neutralizing it. This containment took various forms" (Abd al-Majid Al-Sharafi, 1991, p. 23).

Arkoun calls, in some of his writings, for following the example of the Protestants, stating: "Medieval theology has become an obstacle to progress and has come into conflict with modernity in a terrible and highly harmful manner consider the terrible confrontation currently taking place between fundamentalist movements that embrace medieval theology and modernity, and consider the high or exorbitant price that our peoples are paying as a result. Therefore, we thought of developing a modern theology within Islam, modeled on the Catholic or Protestant theology that emerged following the modernist crisis" (Muhammad Arkoun, 1998, pp. 193-194).

Arkoun also states: "The experience of Christianity with modernity in the nineteenth century shows us that we are confronted with a shared religious psychology among Muslim fundamentalists and Christian fundamentalists alike. This is the strongest evidence that the same methodologies can be applied to all religious traditions. I believe that the human and social sciences would be enriched and acquire greater credibility if they were applied to the Islamic heritage, because until now they have been applied only to the European Christian heritage. This is not sufficient to establish their credibility. They should be applied to another extensive religious heritage such as the Islamic heritage in order to further test their validity, as well as the credibility of their methodologies and terminology" (Muhammad Arkoun, 1998, p. 328).

In explaining the role and nature of modernity, Arkoun states: "Religious thought was, and continues to be, based on the concept of the true religion, which presents people with an absolute, fixed, eternal, and transcendent truth, above the various forms of relative and changing truth subject to historicity and to the laws of becoming and decay. Modernity then emerged and insisted upon the historicity of truth. Nevertheless, classical metaphysics remained attached to the concept of absolute and transcendent truth even after the emergence of the philosophy of the deconstruction of meaning" (Muhammad Arkoun, 2005, p. 10).

B- The Objectives of Modernists in Employing Their Approach

One of the most prominent methodological flaws committed by modernists in their studies of the Holy Qur'an is their consistently negative assessment of virtually every aspect or perspective through which they approach the Qur'an. This has brought their questionable intentions to the surface and made their objectives apparent.

As previously stated in the introduction to this article, criticism is based on evaluation followed by refinement: what is correct is acknowledged and valued, while what is flawed is corrected. However, in the writings of modernists concerning the Holy Qur'an, we observe the dominance of a hostile and bleak view of the Qur'an from various perspectives, with the aim of diminishing its position in the hearts of Muslims and undermining its sacredness. This is, in reality, a clear methodological flaw and an obvious distortion of purpose, far removed from correctness and impartiality. It is the result of the deep-seated hostility that these secular thinkers harbor toward Islam and Muslims, as a consequence of their being influenced by Orientalist and atheistic tendencies.

In this context, Arkoun, expressing his dissatisfaction with Muslims' veneration of the Holy Qur'an, states: "We must explain this strange phenomenon: how can this hallucinated and ideological religious model find such an echo among the masses and succeed in mobilizing hundreds of thousands or even millions of people? How can this happen at the end of the twentieth century and in many Arab and Islamic societies? If we are able to provide a correct answer to this question, we will at the same time shed light on the reason for the decline of the humanist attitude throughout the Islamic world. There is no doubt that the spread of fundamentalism means the decline of the rational attitude" (Muhammad Arkoun, 1997, p. 12).

Regarding the destructive objective underlying the modernist approach, Qutb Al-Raysuni states concerning the modernists: "The destruction of any frame of reference can only be achieved by dismantling it from within and undermining it from its foundations. Merely circling around it without directly confronting it, attacking without hitting the target, is a path that will not yield the desired result. Hence, they entered the field of reading in order to create the impression of the position occupied by the Holy Qur'an within the sphere of legislation and to discourage people emotionally from turning to it for interpretation and exegesis. If they succeed in disabling the critical faculty among the masses, it will become easy for them to empty the Qur'anic text of its content and turn it into a framework for the reader's ideology" (Qutb Al-Raysuni, 2010, p. 415).

Adonis, described as a leading figure of modernity, acknowledges the objective of the modernist approach in the Arab world, stating: "The principle of modernity is the conflict between the system based on traditionalism and the desire to change that system. This conflict was established during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, where we can identify two currents of modernity. The first is political and intellectual, represented on the one hand by revolutionary movements against the existing order, beginning with the Kharijites and culminating in the Zanj Revolt, passing through the Qarmatians and extremist revolutionary movements; and represented, on the other hand, by Mu'tazilism, atheistic rationalism, and particularly Sufism" (Al-Ghamidi, 2005).

Ali Watfa explains that the modernist approach is based on establishing the primacy of material knowledge and excluding religious forms of knowledge: "Scientific knowledge is the fundamental axis through which we understand the universe, its truths, and its causes, regardless of the inherited and traditional forms of knowledge that prevailed during earlier periods of human history" (Watfa As'ad Ali, 2021).

In the same context, Dr. Adnan Rida Al-Nahwi states: "It has been unable to solve human problems within the self and in human relationships. Technology and technical progress may solve the problems of machines and similar problems faced by human beings. However, political, social, psychological, and moral problems, as well as the problems created by human beings themselves, will continue to be confronted by humanity itself. Neither machines nor technology will provide more than limited assistance, regardless of how sophisticated or advanced they become. Human beings have confronted all these problems and searched for solutions in everything available to them, yet they have not found a solution that provides them with reassurance. They have therefore continued to move from one new doctrine to another, moving from one darkness to another, without a stable method or a straight path. Moreover, applied sciences have developed to show human beings that the unknown before them becomes increasingly vast the further they advance, rather than becoming narrower. The problem has become even more difficult as these sciences have provided humanity with weapons capable of destroying its life and threatening its future." Arkoun states: "We will not be able to avoid the problems of theological thinking as long as we continue to regard the Qur'an as a transcendent religious text containing the truth that makes the presence of God permanent" (Adnan Rida Al-Nahwi, pp. 97-98).

Modernists today seek to dismantle everything religious and strive to strengthen and establish the authority of reason while excluding revelation from human existence and life. Hasan Hanafi states in this regard: "The task of heritage and renewal is liberation from authority in all its forms, the authority of the past and the authority of inherited tradition. There is no authority except that of reason, and no authority except that necessitated by reality" (Hasan Hanafi, 1992, p. 45).

In explaining the objective of the modernist reading of the Qur'anic text, Arkoun states: "We want the Qur'an, which is invoked from every direction and read and explained by all Muslim social actors, regardless of their cultural level or

doctrinal competence, to become the subject of critical questioning and new investigations concerning its linguistic, historical, anthropological, theological, and philosophical status” (Muhammad Arkoun, 1996, p. 246).

Arkoun calls for criticizing the Holy Qur'an through the application of Western theories, stating: “If we are compelled to read a text, we first need a general theory concerning what we call a text. This is what I am trying to do now... There are three overlapping or interacting protocols for reading the Qur'an as a text within this perspective: the historical-anthropological reading; the linguistic-semiotic reading; and the theological-exegetical reading. From a methodological standpoint, it must be said that the theological-exegetical reading should not take place until after the first two readings have been conducted and on the basis of the new critical foundations derived from them. This means that the entire traditional reading, which remains dominant to this day primarily for political reasons and by this I mean readings confined within the protocol of faith must be deconstructed. It must be deconstructed culturally and intellectually” (Muhammad Arkoun, 2005, pp. 39–40).

In pursuit of this objective, modernists have adopted various paths and, likewise, indirect approaches that are neither methodological nor scientific in accordance with the objectives they seek to achieve, for means are governed by the same judgments as the ends. I shall examine these approaches in the following section of this article, God willing.

2- The Terminology of the Modernists

In their studies of the Holy Qur'an and their criticisms of it, modernists have sought to employ an implicit approach aimed at attracting minds and rallying supporters and advocates around them. This approach consists in creating terminology and introducing new designations with an alarming or imposing character to replace the familiar and widely used classical terms.

The motive behind adopting this approach is to influence susceptible minds and convey to recipients the impression that renewal and development are taking place in a manner capable of matching and competing with the progress and advancement achieved by the West. However, this approach is neither scientific nor methodologically precise. It is generally established that names do not alter the realities they designate, and that when different expressions and terms are used, there is no substantive objection to differences in terminology. Moreover, the meanings and objectives underlying the terminology they have developed are purely secular in origin. In this regard, the modernist Hisham Sharabi states: “Whether we like it or not, this critical secular thought derives its concepts, terminology, and dimensions from the European experience in its comprehensive sense” (Hisham Sharabi, p. 86).

Hashim Salih states: “We notice that Arkoun uses purely linguistic terms when speaking about the Qur'an. Thus, he says ‘the utterance’ or ‘the linguistic expression’ instead of the Qur'anic verse, and he says ‘the textual corpus’ instead of the Qur'an ... and so on. The reason for this is that he seeks to neutralize the theological associations, or the immense theological aura, surrounding the Qur'an, which for centuries has prevented us from seeing it as it is: that is, as a linguistic text composed of words, letters, and grammatical, linguistic, and rhetorical structures... In other words, the linguistic materiality of the Qur'an has completely disappeared, or remained hidden from our view, because of the immense aura surrounding it” (Muhammad Arkoun, 2005, p. 119).

In his book **Fundamentalist Thought**, under the heading “How Do We Read the Qur'an?”, Arkoun states: “Let us now turn to what people generally call the Qur'an. This word is charged to the utmost degree with the theological work and the continuous Islamic ritual and devotional practice that have existed for hundreds of years, to such an extent that it is difficult to use it as it stands” (Muhammad Arkoun, 1999, p. 29). Here, Arkoun even treats the word “Qur'an” itself as a problematic designation. If this indicates anything, it reflects the intensity of the resentment they harbor toward the primary reference of Muslims.

Hasan Hanafi, expressing his great admiration for earlier philosophers who introduced terminology different from that traditionally used by Muslims in their engagement with the Holy Qur'an, states: “They were able to abandon the particular language of theology God, reward, reckoning, punishment, angel, and devil which is a closed language still governed by religious symbolism, and to employ a more rational, open, and human language that anyone, regardless of their cultural background, could understand, such as [the human being], reason, reflection, action, and virtue. We have now taken another step backward, abandoning development and preferring the language of closed theology to the language of open thought” (Hasan Hanafi, 1992, p. 157).

Ali Harb states: “Those whom the scholars and traditionists used to call the people of the Salaf, whom I prefer to call the people of closure” (Ali Harb, 2005, p. 162).

They are also referred to as “the people of dead reading,” “the proponents of a reading that establishes intellectual stagnation,” “the textualists,” and “those with closed minds” (Ali Harb, 2005, pp. 109, 204).

Dr. Khalid Al-Akk states: “The contemporaneity proclaimed and advocated by these people in what they have presented to Muslims under the title *The Book and the Qur'an: A Contemporary Reading* is intended to sever ties with the authenticity of the Qur'an and Islam. The American Muslim writer Maryam Jameelah states: ‘The Islamic countries have fallen victim to erroneous terminology, including the term modernity, and this term has inflicted great harm upon Islam. Modernity and contemporaneity, in the non-Islamic sense, mean: refusing to accept Islam as a reasonable and comprehensible religion for the peoples of the world’” (Abd al-Rahman Khalid Al-Akk, 1996, p. 51).

Dr. Saeed Al-Ghamdi states: “Anyone who reflects upon modernist definitional systems, from the far right to the far left, will find that they contain an essential intellectual premise whose starting point is the declaration of human independence and self-sufficiency, and whose ultimate end is the deification of the human being, culminating in his own elimination through ideas such as ‘the death of the author,’ ‘the death of the creator,’ ‘the deconstruction of the human being,’ and the like. The philosophical and intellectual starting point of modernity revolves around the ‘centrality of the

human being' and the independence of his existence, which is known as 'humanist thought.' This idea has taken various forms, including 'rationalism,' 'Enlightenment,' 'structuralism,' 'deconstructionism,' and so forth. This starting point has necessitated, and continues to necessitate, transcending everything they regard as 'systemic,' 'conservative,' 'fixed,' or 'institutional,' until, at the height of its extremism, it reaches the transcendence of the 'metaphysical' and the 'value-based.' All of this takes place within what they describe as the elimination of dichotomies. Thus, the text is both signifier and signified, and creativity is both writer and reader, because 'the author has died as soon as he has produced his work.' Culture is likewise both an act and an object of action, and so on, through the elimination of distinctions, boundaries, and parentheses in verbal accumulations that all fundamentally lead to abolishing the duality of creation and Creator. For the believer, this duality signifies the complete distinction between the two and the creature's dependence upon its Creator. The abolition of this duality is what Nietzsche expressed through the 'death of God,' and what some Arab modernists have expressed through such terms as 'the end of transcendencies,' 'the return of human existence,' 'the humanization of the sacred,' 'the humanization of revelation,' and other similar expressions" (Al-Ghamdi, 2005, pp. 3–4).

Among the promotional terms employed by modernists in their approach are: text, textual structure, prophetic discourse, the closed official corpus, expression, ideology, metaphysics, epistemology, hermeneutics, modernization, contemporary reading, and the liberation of reason.

Modernists have also sought to displace certain terms from the field of their study of the Holy Qur'an in order to serve their methodological orientations and destructive objectives. This includes eliminating expressions of reverence and exaltation such as: the Holy Qur'an, the Noble Qur'an, the Wise Qur'an, "Allah the Most High said", "Allah the Almighty has spoken the truth"...

3- The Absence of a Clear Methodology in Modernist Criticism of the Holy Qur'an

The modernists did not adopt a single, unified methodology in applying their ideas and conducting their studies of the Holy Qur'an. Arkoun attempted to present this methodological inconsistency as a positive feature, describing this diversity and contradiction of approaches as "the multidisciplinary approach."

The modernists themselves also differed in their choice of the appropriate methodology for interpreting Qur'anic texts. Examples of this include the following:

Muhammad Shahrur states: "The theory of evolution proposed by the great scholar Charles Darwin is considered an excellent model for interpretation, that is, for interpreting the verses concerning the creation of human beings" (Muhammad Shahrur, n.d., p. 195).

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd states: "Dialectical hermeneutics, after being modified from a dialectical materialist perspective, constitutes an original starting point for examining the relationship between the interpreter and the text, not only in literary texts, but also for reconsidering our religious heritage concerning the interpretation of the Qur'an" (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, 2005, p. 49).

Arkoun calls for criticizing the Holy Qur'an through the application of Western theories, stating: "If we are compelled to read a text, we first need a general theory concerning what we call a text. This is what I am trying to do now... There are three overlapping or interacting protocols for reading the Qur'an as a text within this perspective: the historical-anthropological reading, the linguistic-semiotic reading, and the theological-exegetical reading. From a methodological standpoint, it must be said that the theological-exegetical reading should not take place until after the first two readings have been conducted and on the basis of the new critical foundations derived from them. This means that the entire traditional reading, which remains dominant to this day primarily for political reasons and by this I mean readings confined within the protocol of faith must be deconstructed. It must be deconstructed culturally and intellectually" (Muhammad Arkoun, 2005, pp. 39–40).

Arkoun also implicitly calls for mobilizing various critical methodologies in order to criticize the Qur'an, stating: "We believe that any genuine criticism of religious reason should consist in employing all the sources of rationality and thought offered to us by the human and social sciences, in order to displace the problematic of revelation from the intellectual system and epistemological position specific to dogmatic thought, toward the spaces of analysis and interpretation opened up by the new exploratory reason that has recently emerged... We must succeed in definitively and irreversibly departing from the theological system of absolute truth."

Among the attempts to employ the linguistic methodology is Arkoun's reference to one of its principles, in which he states: "There are things that are lost or transformed in the transition from the oral stage to the written stage" (Muhammad Arkoun, 1999, p. 53).

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, for his part, relied on Marxist theory in his criticism of the Holy Qur'an. This is evident in his statement: "Religious texts are in no way texts detached from the cultural structure within which they were formed" (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, 1995, p. 92).

Perhaps it is useful to examine here a single example, namely, the reading developed by Arkoun of Surat al-Fātiḥah, in which he employed a variety of approaches. These may be summarized as follows:

A- The Marxist Approach:

This approach is evident in his praise of Marxist theory and his appreciation of its role in overcoming intellectual stagnation and classical thought when discussing the eight principles that dominated the interpretation of the meanings of Surat al-Fātiḥah. He states: "We must understand that these eight principles played a guiding role that controlled all fields of Arab-Islamic thought until the advent of the era of socialist-Marxist ideology. Today, an actual break with these principles is taking place, but it is not accompanied by a theoretical break" (Muhammad Arkoun, 2005, p. 122).

B- The Linguistic Approach:

This approach is clearly evident in Arkoun's discussion of the interpretation of the words of Allah the Most High:
 { صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ 7 }
 [Al-Fātiḥah: 7]

He states: "The definite article has a classificatory function in the following linguistic structures: *the straight path; those upon whom You have bestowed Your favor/the favored ones; those who incurred anger; the misguided.* These structures constitute concepts or categories of persons precisely identified by the speaker and capable of being identified by the addressee when the latter, in turn, becomes a speaker or utterer" (Muhammad Arkoun, 2005, p. 127).

Some leading modernists, including "Arkoun," are regarded by the author as lacking knowledge of the Arabic language and the dialects of its tribes. He therefore believes that Arkoun took upon himself the task of navigating turbulent waters that he could have avoided, and climbed a difficult path that he would have been better advised not to undertake. Accordingly, I believe that fairness requires us to disregard this man's writings on his criticism of the Qur'an, which was revealed in clear Arabic, particularly since all his writings in this field were produced in a weak and inadequate French language through which he sought to discuss linguistic issues in the Holy Qur'an.

C- Reinforcing Esoteric Interpretation:

This approach primarily relies on reason. He states: "Al-ḥamdu lillāh [Praise be to Allah] ... al-Raḥīm [the Most Merciful] ... refers us to ontology; Mālikī yawmī al-dīn [Master of the Day of Judgment] ... refers us to eschatology; iyyāka na'budu [You alone we worship] ... refers us to rituals and religious practices; ihdīnā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm [Guide us to the straight path] refers us to ethics; ṣirāṭ alladhīna an'amta 'alayhim [the path of those upon whom You have bestowed Your favor] refers us to the science of prophecy; ghayri al-maghdūbi 'alayhim [not those who have incurred Your anger] ... refers us to the spiritual history of humanity" (Muhammad Arkoun, 2005, p. 143).

D- The Symbolic Approach:

This approach appears at the conclusion of his reading of Surat al-Fātiḥah (Muhammad Arkoun, 2005, p. 144).

At times, we also find him praising and emphasizing the historical approach.

This mixture and combination of methodologies in dealing with the Qur'anic text demonstrates, in the author's view, the inconsistency of modernist thought and the arbitrary nature of their criticism and writing.

They also employed the historical approach in their studies, which further illustrates the disorder characterizing modernist applications to the Qur'anic text.

4- The Modernists' Position on Transmitted Evidence

It is widely known and frequently reported about the modernists that they hold a negative position toward transmitted evidence. Indeed, transmitted texts have been subjected to sharp attacks and severe criticism on their part. This position is clearly evident in their works and throughout their writings, beginning with their claims concerning the late compilation of the Sunnah and the assertion that it was recorded only to serve political purposes. They also argue that the Sunnah was not subjected to an official process of compilation comparable to the official compilation of the Holy Qur'an, in addition to their vehement attack on the "isnad" system employed by hadith scholars in transmitting the Sunnah.

The modernists have even criticized the person of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, describing him as passive. In this regard, Al-Sharafi states: "The traditional Islamic theory of revelation is the theory based on considering the Prophet a passive vessel who merely conveys what he has been commanded to convey" (Abd al-Majid Al-Sharafi, 1991, p. 88). They have also criticized his Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, and have at times described them as a "gang."

The modernists have also held that the Sunnah does not constitute authoritative evidence. An example of this is what Arkoun states when speaking about those whom he describes as extremists: "They believe that the tradition (the Sunnah) should prevail over every innovation." Considering the Sunnah merely as heritage requires stripping it of the particular characteristics that made it a second source of Islamic law. This entails regarding the Sunnah simply as a discourse or text that emerged at a particular point in history for a specific purpose and which does not possess a permanent character" (Muhammad Arkoun, 1996, p. 102).

Muhammad Shahrur states: "The problem arises once again from the jurists' claim that what Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, declared lawful remains lawful until the Day of Resurrection, and what Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, declared unlawful remains unlawful until the Day of Resurrection. It also arises from their assumption that the Prophet's regulatory decisions possess the authority of the comprehensive, absolute, and everlasting Revelation, forgetting that the declaration of what is lawful and unlawful belongs exclusively to Allah, and that the permanent restriction of what is absolutely lawful necessarily falls under the category of prohibiting what Allah has made lawful. Such authority was not granted by Him to anyone, including the messengers" (Muhammad Shahrur, 2000, p. 160).

What concerns us here is that, despite the modernists' negative position toward the Prophetic Sunnah and its process of compilation, we nevertheless find them citing it when seeking to cast doubt upon the Holy Qur'an. This constitutes a clear breach of scholarly methodology, since it is unreasonable to rely upon supposedly unreliable foundations which, from the modernists' own perspective, are not firmly established and then make them the basis of their critical enterprise.

This methodological inconsistency and contradictory attitude toward transmitted evidence have repeatedly appeared in the modernists' criticism of the Qur'an. Examples include the following:

A-In his discussion of the first compilation of the Qur'an, Tayyib Tizini states: "The Qur'an was not compiled into a codex until a few years after the death of the Messenger. The first initiative came from 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, in the form of a proposal he put forward to Abu Bakr, who was the caliph at the time. This means that during Muhammad's lifetime, there was at least nothing definitive of this kind" (Tayyib Tizini, 1997, p. 63).

This statement immediately raises a question concerning transmitted evidence in relation to 'Umar's suggestion to Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, may Allah be pleased with them both. This report can only be established through transmitted evidence. How, then, did Tizini rely upon an event established through transmission, despite the modernists' clearly stated approach toward transmitted texts and evidence?!

A- Another example is Tayyib Tizini's argument concerning the alleged incompleteness of the transmitted Qur'anic text, based on the report of Zayd ibn Thabit:

"I therefore searched for the Qur'an and collected it from the parchments, shoulder blades, palm stalks, and from the memories of men, until I found two verses from Surat al-Tawbah with Abu Khuzaymah al-Ansari that I did not find with anyone else."

Tizini comments: "Zayd ibn Thabit here declares that he accepted what he found with Abu Khuzaymah al-Ansari from the Qur'an, despite the fact that he did not find it with anyone else. In other words, Zayd proceeded on the basis that documentary credibility could be granted to a transmitter without a witness supporting what he reported. If this was possible, then why did Zayd refuse to accept what 'Umar ibn al-Khattab possessed, namely the verse concerning stoning, which he alone had in his possession?!" (Tayyib Tizini, 1997, p. 147).

C- Abu Zayd states, commenting on the writing of the Qur'an according to the language of Quraysh: "...and we would not be exaggerating if we said that establishing the reading of the text, which had been revealed in multiple readings, according to the Quraysh reading was part of Islam's ideological orientation toward establishing Quraysh supremacy" (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, 1996, p. 62).

The question that naturally arises here is: From where did Abu Zayd obtain the information that the Holy Qur'an was compiled according to the language of Quraysh? Is this not itself derived from transmitted reports whose transmitters and chains of transmission he criticizes?!

D- Here we find Arkoun lamenting the loss of the codex of Ibn Mas'ud, may Allah be pleased with him, while expressing his objection to the actions of 'Uthman. He states: "'Uthman's compilation resulted in a number of regrettable readings: the elimination of the earlier individual collections and the materials upon which some of the verses had been recorded; the arbitrary restriction of the readings to five; and the removal of the highly important collection of Ibn Mas'ud, who was a noble Companion" (Muhammad Arkoun, 1982, pp. 31–32).

From where, then, did Arkoun establish the authenticity of such a claim concerning 'Uthman, may Allah be pleased with him, when such an account can only be established through transmitted evidence? This is, indeed, an exercise in futility. At this point, I began to feel that the modernists write simply for the sake of writing and contradict merely for the sake of contradiction. They adopt a theoretical position only to violate it in practice!

5- The Status of Reason among Modernists and Their Mechanisms for Criticizing and Challenging the Holy Qur'an

A- The Status of Reason among Modernists:

The employment of reason and the enhancement of its status in dealing with the Holy Qur'an constitute the foundation, cornerstone, and indeed the ultimate objective of the modernist approach as a whole. We find that modernists sanctify reason and make it the basis and axis of existence. In their view, anything transmitted that contradicts or conflicts with human reason is false and invalid. There is no doubt that this represents a flawed excess, since it is universally acknowledged by every rational person that the various cognitive faculties of human beings are limited and not absolute. Perception through sight is limited, perception through hearing is limited, and perception through reason is likewise limited. Yet modernists have chosen to move against this current, attempting to impose human reason as a criterion for religious texts, in an explicit imitation of the rationalist revolution brought about by the Protestants against the Church, while overlooking the fact that that revolution was directed against distorted religions and beliefs whose actual conditions conflicted with the findings of science and reason.

They have also ignored the fact that Islam, in its purity, authenticity, and preservation, does not conflict with human reason. They therefore made strenuous efforts to undermine Islam through their corrupted reasoning by promoting the obsolete ideas and approaches of the Orientalists. Thus, they lost their way and forfeited the truth. They forgot that Islam itself is a religion of reason, and that transmitted revelation does not contradict reason.

The following are some statements made by modernists regarding the sanctity of human reason:

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd states: "There is no *ijtihad* in the field of creed." This is what religious discourse declares, disregarding the fact that beliefs are conceptions contingent upon the level of consciousness and upon the development of that level of consciousness in every age.

Adonis states: "The Qur'an, insofar as it is a text, has been completed and brought to an end, whereas history, insofar as it consists of events, is neither complete nor finished, but remains open. This conflict between revelation and history is what the movement of interpretation has attempted to eliminate. Interpretation is therefore a reading of the texts of revelation in a manner that does not conflict with the movement of history; rather, it is compatible with it. Hence the insistence that this reading must extract the meaning that does not conflict with reason." (Ali Ahmad Adonis, 1994, p. 1/134).

Hasan Hanafi states: "The task of Heritage and Renewal is liberation from authority in all its forms: the authority of the past and the authority of inherited tradition. There is no authority except that of reason, and no authority except where necessitated by the requirements of reality." (Hasan Hanafi, 1992, p. 45).

Al-Sharafi states regarding the position of reason within the modernist approach: "It is necessary to pause before one of its fundamental requirements (that is, modernity) in thought, economics, politics, and other fields, namely rationality.

Modernity cannot be conceived without rationalizing all these fields. It was rationality that led to scientific and technological progress and served as the philosophical foundation for all literary and intellectual movements since the Enlightenment. Without it, it is impossible to understand the political and administrative structures, and even bureaucracy, upon which modern states were established and which replaced the feudal system.” (Abd al-Majid al-Sharafi, 1991, p. 29).

B- The Modernists’ Mechanisms for Criticizing the Holy Qur’an

As previously mentioned in this article, the modernists have adopted an approach that deviates from scientific methodology in their criticism of the Holy Qur’an. Most of this approach is based on casting doubt and raising questions concerning established certainties, without providing alternatives. Among these mechanisms are the following:

A- Working to Cast Doubt on the Divine Source of the Holy Qur’an and Ridiculing Those Who Hold This Belief:

Arkoun states: “The simplistic definition of revelation in Islamic contexts is generally presented through two ritual expressions commonly or generally used by any Muslim when citing any passage from the Qur’an. He begins his speech by saying, ‘God Almighty has said,’ and concludes it by saying, ‘God Almighty has spoken the truth.’ There is no room whatsoever for discussion regarding authorship or the divine status of the content of the cited text. We observe that revelation is not subjected to questioning and does not become problematic; rather, it is reaffirmed for Muslims whose faith may be exposed to disturbance or shaken under the influence of modern scientific thought.” (Muhammad Arkoun, 2005, p. 17).

Arkoun states, attributing the Holy Qur’an to ancient religious traditions: “As I contemplate reducing the Qur’an to nothing more than the biblical and Hebrew sources...” (Muhammad Arkoun, 1999, p. 53).

At other times, they attempt to regard the Holy Qur’an as one of the psychological obsessions and inner conflicts through which the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, was passing, in an attempt to establish the human origin of revelation and to humanize the Qur’an so that it may become subject to criticism, error, and deficiency. Abd al-Majid al-Sharafi states in this regard: “Revelation is therefore the source of the Prophet’s knowledge: that is, that exceptional state in which consciousness is absent and acquired faculties are suspended, allowing the buried reservoir deep within the unconscious to emerge...” (Abd al-Majid al-Sharafi, 2008).

Some of them went so far as to consider the source of revelation to be the broad imagination bestowed upon the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. Hasan Hanafi states in this regard: “The Prophet perceives revelation through his imagination: that is, words and mental images, whether true or false. Therefore, the prophets transcended the knowledge of things within rational limits and expressed them through symbols and examples, just as they expressed spiritual realities through sensory analogies. This is the method consistent with the nature of imagination.” (Spinoza, 2005, p. 48). This statement is in fact the view of the Orientalist Nöldeke, who states: “Prophethood, in its entirety, proceeds from fertile imagination and inspiration that is closer to feeling than to theoretical reason.” (Theodor Nöldeke, 2009, p. 2/12).

They attributed it to madness; they spoke of epilepsy; they spoke of hysteria; they spoke of psychological agitation; and they offered other such explanations.

Among the modernists are those who maintained that the source of the Qur’an is indeed from God, but that it underwent alteration and distortion, and that its sacredness was something it had possessed before its revelation, whereas after its revelation it became a human historical heritage, comparable to other literary texts.

Anyone who carefully examines these modernists’ positions regarding the source of the Holy Qur’an will recognize that there is considerable confusion and contradiction among their statements. This confirms the methodological flaw, or flaws, in the approaches they followed in their investigation of the source of the Holy Qur’an. Nevertheless, each of these claims has been subjected to numerous scholarly refutations and trenchant criticisms, the details of which cannot be accommodated here.

B- Casting Doubt on the Preservation of the Holy Qur’an:

The modernists have attempted to cast doubt on the preservation of the Holy Qur’an. Among their claims is the statement of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd: “And His saying, the Most High: { إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ 9 } [al-Hijr: 9],

does not mean direct divine intervention in the process of preservation, compilation, and recording. Rather, it means intervention through the believing human being by means of conveying the glad tidings, encouragement, urging, and exhortation concerning the importance of this preservation. Understanding [preservation] as direct intervention from the divine perspective indicates an awareness that contradicts Islam itself, insofar as Islam is the essence of a religion that brought an end to the direct relationship between heaven and earth, except through the directives and guidance contained in the Holy Qur’an and in the established Sunnah of revelation concerning the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him.” (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, 1995, pp. 69–70).

The modernists, including Muhammad Abed al-Jabri, also cite the verses concerning abrogation, forgetfulness, and alteration, arguing that change occurs by the will and knowledge of God (Muhammad Abed al-Jabri, 2006, p. 1/232).

Hashim Salih, a disciple of Arkoun, states: “The Qur’an was not established, as we believe, during the time of Uthman. Rather, the conflict remained intense until the fourth century AH, when it was finally closed through an implicit agreement between the Sunnis and the Shiites, because the continuation of the conflict would have harmed both parties. Thereafter, it became a final text to which nothing could be added and from which nothing could be removed.” (Muhammad Arkoun, 2005, p. 115).

Anyone who carefully reflects on this statement will recognize the malicious intent behind it, as its purpose is to promote the idea that the Qur'anic text was subject to fluctuation, addition, and deletion throughout those four centuries. This is undoubtedly a claim for which history provides no evidence whatsoever, whether sound or even weak. This method of lying, distortion, and fabrication is very common in modernist readings.

C- Casting Doubt on the Subjects and Information Contained in the Holy Qur'an:

The modernists have also attempted to exploit the issue of casting doubt on the subjects and information contained in the Holy Qur'an. Taha Hussein states: "The Torah may tell us about Abraham and Ishmael, and the Qur'an may also tell us about them, but the occurrence of these two names in the Torah and the Qur'an is not sufficient to establish their historical existence, let alone to establish the story that tells us of Ishmael ibn Abraham's migration to Mecca." (Taha Hussein, p. 38).

Khalaf Allah Muhammad Ahmad calls for the rejection of Qur'anic narratives, stating: "The human intellect has the right to disregard these reports, to remain ignorant of them, to disagree with them, or to deny them." (Ahmad Khalaf Allah Muhammad, 1999, p. 74).

Hisham Djait, denying the existence of Moses, states: "What we know about Moses is so vague that it is possible to doubt his existence altogether." (Hisham Djait, 2000, p. 124).

Adonis states: "The avant-garde must criticize the forms of metaphysical consciousness that, on the one hand, obstruct the development of consciousness and, on the other, contribute to consolidating and perpetuating a culture oriented toward the past. It must therefore undertake this criticism." (Ali Ahmad Adonis, 1994).

This position has been subjected to numerous criticisms by Muslim scholars and by fair-minded scholars on the other side, some of whose testimonies will be mentioned later in this article, God willing.

D- Their Attempt to Place the Holy Qur'an on the Same Level as Other Human Speech:

Another mechanism adopted by the modernists in their attempt to undermine the status of the Holy Qur'an is their effort to place the Qur'an on the same level as all other forms of speech.

In this regard, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd states: "Discourses share, to a great extent, the nature of the problems that determine their expression, meaning, and structure ... All discourses are equal insofar as they are discourses, and none of them has the right to claim possession of the truth; for when it does so, it condemns itself as a false discourse." (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, 1995, p. 8).

Nasr Abu Zayd states: "Religious texts, when analyzed, are nothing more than linguistic texts, meaning that they belong to a specific cultural structure and were produced according to the laws of that culture." (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, 1994, p. 203).

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd also states: "The reader of Surat al-Shu'ara', which is cited as evidence for the prohibition of poetry, can easily perceive its poetic structure; it is poetry diminishing the status of poetry." (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, 2010, p. 119).

Abu Zayd also states: "It is necessary to point out here that the issue of the Qur'anic inimitability was essentially centered on the concept of the Qur'an's literary superiority over all forms of human speech, whether poetry or prose." (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, 2010, p. 121).

Arkoun states: "The Qur'an is a limited and open collection of texts in the Arabic language, which we can access as they appear in the text established in written form after the fourth century." (Muhammad Arkoun, 1982, p. 32).

There is no doubt that the linguistic inimitability of the Holy Qur'an manifested itself and became evident to the polytheists of Mecca, who were masters of language, eloquence, rhetoric, and expression. Yet they were unable to meet its challenge. Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with them both, relates:

"Al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah came to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and he recited the Qur'an to him. It was as though his heart was softened by it. When this reached Abu Jahl, he went to him and said: 'Uncle, your people intend to collect money for you!' He said: 'Why?' He replied: 'To give it to you, for you have gone to Muhammad seeking something from what came before him.' He said: 'Quraysh knows that I am among the wealthiest of them.' He said: 'Then say something about it that will reach your people and make them believe that you reject it or dislike it.' He said: 'And what should I say? By Allah, there is no man among you who knows poetry better than I do, nor who knows its *rajaz*, its odes, or the poetry of the jinn better than I do. By Allah, what he says resembles none of this. By Allah, his words possess sweetness, and upon them is a certain beauty. Its upper part is fruitful, its lower part is abundant, it rises above and nothing rises above it, and it crushes everything beneath it.' He said: 'Your people will not be satisfied with you until you say something about it.' He said: 'Leave me until I think.' When he had thought, he said: 'This is nothing but transmitted magic,' meaning that he learned it from others. Then the verse was revealed: "Leave Me with the one I created alone." (Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi, 1405 AH, pp. 2/198-199).

This constitutes the testimony of one of the scholars of Arabic during the period of linguistic authority, affirming the impossibility of the Qur'anic text being of human origin. Yet most modernists have refused to accept this testimony and have persisted in turning away from it.

E- Establishing Imaginary Rules for Dealing with the Holy Qur'an:

The modernists have also attempted to establish imaginary rules for dealing with the Holy Qur'an. They maintain that the meanings of religious texts are relative, that their meanings are not final, but rather remain open and conjectural. Arkoun states in this regard: "The Qur'an is a collection of meanings and significations proposed to all human beings; consequently, it is capable of giving rise to or producing diverse doctrinal orientations and tendencies, in accordance with the diversity of the historical circumstances and conditions in which they arise or are generated. The Qur'an is an open

text to all meanings, and no exegete or act of interpretation can close it or exhaust it in a definitive and orthodox manner.” (Muhammad Arkoun, 1996, p. 145).

Ali Harb states: “There is no difference between the classical exegetes and us, except that they interpreted it within the limits of their intellectual capacities and according to the concepts current in their age, whereas today we employ the concepts provided to us by our modern sciences, which are particularly prevalent in the Western epistemological field.” (Ali Harb, 2005, p. 78).

He then states: “Every reader experiments with his own language through it and tests his own concepts; each one imposes upon it his own meaning and reads it according to his strategy. All are equal in this respect, whether they are from the past or from the present.” (Ali Harb, 2005, p. 80).

Arkoun states: “Contemporary scholars and religious figures, like their predecessors, do not possess the conceptual and terminological apparatus that enables them to understand the fundamentalist position and the philosophical position without creating a contradiction between them. Myth, mythology, ritual, symbolic capital, the linguistic sign, the elementary structures of signification and meaning, metaphor, the production and art of storytelling, historicity, consciousness and the unconscious, the social imaginary, conception, the system of belief and unbelief ... all of these constitute terms that are continually reformulated and renewed through contemporary scientific research. This conceptual apparatus is entirely absent from the field of fundamentalist thought ... The use of these new tools in analysis, theorization, and understanding still awaits those who will undertake it in order to study Islamic thought and reactivate and renew it.” (Muhammad Arkoun, 1996, p. 23).

F- Excluding the Statements of Earlier Scholars in Interpreting the Meanings of the Holy Qur'an:

The modernists attempted to establish the legitimacy of their approach by eliminating and excluding the interpretations of the earlier scholars, among whom and within whose environment the Qur'an was revealed. They rejected the statements of the Companions and even turned away from the statements of the Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, concerning interpretation, in accordance with the principle established by Hasan Hanafi: namely, that a new structure cannot be built upon firm foundations unless the old one is demolished and removed. (Hasan Hanafi, 1992, p. 24).

Muhammad Shahrur, undermining the understanding of the Companions, states: “If someone asks me: Is what was sufficient for the Companions in understanding the Book and the Qur'an not sufficient for you? My answer, with complete boldness and certainty, is: No. What was sufficient for them is not sufficient for me, because my scientific background differs from theirs. My methods of scientific research differ from theirs. I live in an age entirely different from theirs. The challenges I face differ from their challenges. I confront powerful and formidable philosophies that have entered my very home, and I face scientific progress that affects every movement and every decision I make in my life. I would be deluded if I said, or accepted, that what was sufficient for them is sufficient for me.” (Muhammad Shahrur, n.d., p. 567).

The modernists did not limit themselves to undermining the interpretation and understanding of the Companions and the early generations; they also undermined the Prophet's interpretation, peace and blessings be upon him. In this regard, Muhammad Ahmad Khalaf Allah, quoting Anwar al-Jundi, states: “The Prophet's interpretation of the Qur'an is a human statement, and by saying ‘human’ we mean that it is not binding; it may be accepted or rejected. It is inconceivable that the statement of a human being could possess a binding character.” (Anwar al-Jundi, n.d., pp. 303–304).

Arkoun states: “But we cannot return to the prophetic model because we clearly perceive its historicity and its integration into the patterns of meaning production that transcend the historical framework.” (Muhammad Arkoun, 2005, p. 86).

Abu Zayd, rejecting Prophetic interpretation, states: “The Prophet's understanding of the text represents the first stage in the movement of the text in its interaction with the human intellect. No attention should be paid to the claims of religious discourse that the Prophet's understanding corresponds to the intrinsic meaning of the text, assuming that such an intrinsic meaning exists. Such a claim leads to a form of polytheism, insofar as it equates the absolute with the relative and the fixed with the changing, by equating the divine intention with the human understanding of that intention, even if that understanding belongs to the Prophet. It is a claim that leads either to deifying the Prophet or to sanctifying him by concealing the fact that he was a human being and focusing instead on the fact that he was a prophet.” (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, 1994, p. 126).

G- Opposing Rulings and Legal Punishments on the Pretext That They Are Unsuitable for Modern Times

Hashim Salih states, with the aim of abolishing rulings and legal punishments: “It is clear that the Qur'anic rulings or its legal punishments require interpretation in order to conform to the mentality of modernity. However, interpretation in the philosophical sense of the term has not yet entered the Arab or Islamic arena. Therefore, if we take the rulings on inheritance, marriage, and divorce literally, they come into conflict with the modern mentality in the first place; hence the necessity of interpretation.” (Muhammad Arkoun, 1999, p. 261).

There is no doubt that casting doubt without evidence or an alternative constitutes a clear methodological flaw. The same applies to criticism undertaken merely for the sake of criticism. As for the principle of dismantling in order to rebuild, no two people can disagree about the shallowness of any methodology that adopts such a premise in its applications.

C- Refuting the Modernists' Mechanisms for Criticizing the Holy Qur'an

The counter-response to the ideas and mechanisms adopted by the modernists was articulated by Maurice Bucaille, one of the fair-minded researchers from the other side who sought the truth. Having grown up within the intellectual environment of modern critical methodologies, he states:

"I studied the Holy Qur'an without any preconceived ideas and with complete objectivity, seeking to determine the degree of agreement between the Qur'anic text and the findings of modern science. Through a careful study of the Arabic text, I was able to compile a list which, upon completion, demonstrated to me that the Qur'an contains no statement that can be criticized from the standpoint of modern science." (Maurice Bucaille, 2004, p. 17).

He also states: "No scientific subject addressed by the Qur'an contradicts the scientific viewpoint." (Maurice Bucaille, 2004, p. 16).

Maurice Bucaille states: "When we compare the Qur'anic text with modern findings, how can we not be astonished by those precise statements which cannot reasonably be assumed to have originated from the mind of a human being who lived approximately fourteen centuries ago?" (Maurice Bucaille, 2004, p. 202).

He also states: "If the author of the Qur'an were a human being, how could he, in the seventh century of the Christian era, have written what has now been shown to be in agreement with modern scientific knowledge?" (Maurice Bucaille, 2004, p. 152).

Maurice Bucaille also acknowledged that the West had been highly prejudiced against the Holy Qur'an by subjecting its divine source to criticism. He states: "Thus, in the West, Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, is often judged on the claim that he did nothing more than transmit material from the Torah and the Gospel. This is a judgment without a trial." (Maurice Bucaille, 2004, p. 156).

Acknowledging that the Holy Qur'an is a revelation from an All-Knowing Lord to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, he states while discussing the story of the Flood and comparing its events with those reported in the Qur'an: "... We must therefore accept another explanation, namely that there was a revelation from God that came after the revelation contained in the Torah." (Maurice Bucaille, 2004, p. 252).

Bucaille also states, discussing the recording and preservation of the Qur'anic text: "As for the Qur'an, immediately upon its revelation, and continuously thereafter, the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and the believers around him recited it from memory, while the scribes among his Companions recorded it. Thus, from the very beginning, the Qur'an possessed these two elements of authenticity, which the Gospels do not possess." (Maurice Bucaille, 2004, p. 159).

He also states: "The authenticity of the Qur'an is beyond dispute and gives the text a special status among the revealed books. Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament shares with the Qur'anic text this degree of authenticity." (Maurice Bucaille, 2004, p. 158).

The English Orientalist Liner states: "To the extent of my knowledge of the Jewish and Christian religions, I say that what Muhammad taught was not an imitation or quotation, but rather was revealed to him by his Lord. There is no doubt about this so long as we believe that it came to us from One who is Mighty and All-Knowing. With all respect and reverence, I say: the sacrifice of personal interests, sincerity of purpose, firm and steadfast faith, sincere and penetrating insight into the subtleties and hidden aspects of sin and error, and the use of the best means to eliminate them all these are signs pointing to Muhammad's prophethood and to the fact that revelation was bestowed upon him." (Liner, 1423 AH, pp. 4-5).

Murad Hofmann states: "A non-Muslim may deny the originality of Qur'anic revelation, but he cannot deny the authenticity of the Qur'anic text and that it is precisely what Muhammad read, letter for letter. The Orientalists tried in vain, by every possible means, to deny this, but without success. Had they applied those methods to the Bible, nothing of it would have remained except fragments." (Murad Hofmann, 1997, p. 27).

Conclusion

Praise be to Allah, by whose grace righteous deeds are completed.

To proceed, this modest study has been my attempt to undermine the strongholds of the modernist approach and its foundations in the criticism of the Qur'anic text, through my reading and inductive examination of the writings of its leading figures and the thought of those who carry its banner. This has revealed a number of flaws in which this approach and its proponents are entangled. I do not claim to have arrived at the complete truth or to have encompassed the subject in its entirety. Rather, I hope that further studies may be written on this subject that are better, more precise, more rigorous, and more forceful in confronting those who spread such doubts and those who applaud and support them, in defense of religion, in support of the Great Qur'an, and in refutation of the doubts raised by those who seek to mislead and promote falsehood.

These flaws may be summarized, as a conclusion to the study, in six points:

- 1- The unsound objective underlying the modernist approach.
- 2- The mechanisms employed by modernists in criticizing the Holy Qur'an.
- 3- The inconsistency of the modernists' position regarding transmitted evidence.
- 4- Their concern with creating polarizing terminology in their writings.
- 5- The absence of a clear methodology in modernist studies when dealing with the Holy Qur'an.
- 6- The arbitrary use of reason in dealing with the Qur'anic text.

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