The question about understanding religious discourse

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It is clear that asking about how we understand religious discourse, both textually and legally, and how we can interpret what is stated and what is not stated, is a methodological question that seeks clarification and follows a path of diligence without dogmatic assertions. If such a question were to be posed in previous centuries, it would have been considered naïve and foolish, as the general perception at that time was based on clarity and explanation based on "evidence and proof," although this clarity was filled with incoherence and contradiction.

Such a proposition cannot live in the midst of centuries of clarity and clarification, in the midst of civilized stability. Today, the proposition has become an urgent matter that cannot remain imprisoned in the hearts of sincere and committed researchers, who are aware of the waves of contradiction that have affected Islamic thought, past and present.

The political and social events that have swept through the Islamic world in recent decades have prompted this methodological inquiry to open a door that has been closed for centuries. In addition to the fact that the "modern renaissance consciousness" period did not witness a serious and purposeful movement toward the aforementioned question among scholars, thinkers, philosophers, jurists, and others, due to the absence of incentives resulting from the lack of civilization development, compared to what the past two centuries have witnessed. Likewise, the major events that have affected the Islamic world during these two centuries did not witness such a movement, even though they worked to pressure and pave the way towards the previous question. The need still exists for more push and alertness toward

creating a comprehensive framework for that issue.

Neither civilizational friction led to action according to the aforementioned methodological question, nor did the end of the caliphate system lead to that kind of movement, and the same thing we say about the conflict that continued - and still is - between the ancient and the modern, between adhering to the literalness of the "text" and the way of the "righteous predecessors" from on the one hand, and submitting to the requirements of the present on the other hand, or between standing at the edge of the heritage and accompanying the present to it, and between looking forward to this present and pulling the heritage towards it by interpretation and ideology, according to making the present a key to the past as is done by geologists. All of this did not work on highlighting the content of the aforementioned methodological question.

All that these events created was a stimulus to intellectual projects that belong to specific contents and partial aspects, without prompting the creation of organic projects of the overall type, according to what is known as understanding the spirit and the general method by which the articulated system of intellectual content is determined.

The struggle for women's rights emerged with the publication of Qasim Amin's books "The Liberation of Women" and "The New Woman," but it was a small piece of a larger theater of conflict that the mind struggles to understand. The conflict over the theory of governance was also sparked by Ali Abd al-Raziq in his book "Islam and the foundations of political power," leading to numerous studies that entered into the series of this conflict, as was the case with the book "Rejection of the Book of Islam and the foundations of political power" by Sheikh Muhammad al-Khudari Hussein, and the book "Islamic Political Theories" by Muḥammad Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Rayyis, and others.

Later, there was a conflict among Shiite scholars, which was initiated by Imam Khomeini in his book "Islamic Government," contributing to

raising awareness first, and then a formula for governance was developed, leading to the creation of jurisprudential studies that follow this path, such as the book "Studies in the Guardianship of the Jurist and the Jurisprudence of the Islamic State" by Sheikh Montazeri, and the book "The Basis of Islamic Government" by Sayyid Kazim al-Haeri. These developments have led to a new conflict between what is known as the theory of "absolute guardianship of the jurist" and another party that has emerged from the circumstances of governance and has begun to proclaim itself as carrying the theory of "shura" that is exclusive to the jurists, as is clear from the book "The Shura of Jurists" by Sayyid Murtada al-Shirazi and some other Shiite journals. It represents an alternative to the project of the "Islamic government" or the "absolute guardianship of the jurist."

These conditions led to the emergence of a third party that sought to reconcile democracy and the Islamic governance system, but it has not matured yet. There was also a general theoretical conflict related to the question of tradition and modernity, which was a topic that overshadowed other conflicts in the Arab arena during the second half of the twentieth century.

It is noteworthy that despite the fact that these intellectual conflicts have become deeply rooted as a result of the developments in the circumstances, they have remained superficial and do not express the true essence of the fundamental conflict. They are like the branches and leaves of a tree that hide the roots beneath the surface of the ground, even though these roots are what provide it with life and growth. What is hidden is the foundation of what has appeared and continues to appear, even if it is obscured by those who are involved in the conflict or if they overlook it, like a solid iceberg in the depths of the ocean. This means that the superficial manifestations of the intellectual conflict reflect a hidden conflict that touches on the overall system of understanding religious discourse and that the superficial appearances on the surface of the sea of thought are nothing more than manifestations of the depths of its overall spirit.

Thus, the conflicts witnessed in the Arab and Islamic arena are conflicts that touch on the superstructure of understanding without addressing its underlying construction, and judgment cannot be made on the former unless the latter is addressed. The superstructure of thought in all its various manifestations and forms, including those related to religious understanding, is based on the underlying construction, and this understanding in its various manifestations, whether related to political, social, economic, or other issues, is all hostage to understanding that is fundamentally rooted and characterized by holistic and comprehensiveness. Even if it appears hidden to those who submit to it in understanding and knowledge generation.

There are important and bold projects that have emerged recently, and some of them dealt with Islamic thought from the angle of its relationship to understanding religious discourse directly, but its defect was that it dealt with the thought in a fragmentary manner that lacked overall and comprehensive methodology as is the case with the works of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd.

Some others tried to understand the joints of Islamic thought, highlighting and criticizing it, but its affliction was that it did not practice its cognitive activity as required by the overall system of thought, which made it appear as if it revolved around what the heritage revolved around, without regulations that hold it and control it in spirit and methods, as shown by Hassan Hanafi's three-front project.

This thinker was waving his multiple references to his new approach to understanding religious discourse, as a culmination of the project that he started a long time ago, so we expected at the first edition of the book (Introduction to Understanding Islam) that it would be more significant compared to what we had seen in previous studies, as he had found his unique way to understand discourse, as is evident from the signs that the project's founder has raised here and there.

And When this approach appeared in his book, "From Text to Reality," in 2005, we found that it did not go beyond the formalities of the principles of jurisprudence and its traditional content, without offering anything new except for the call to give priority to reason and reality - especially public interest - over the text.

Thus, he considered his book, "From Text to Reality," to be written for the jurist and to ward off suspicions about the application of Islamic law. The book was written for the jurist "to improve reasoning and prevail the public interest, which is the basis of legislation, over the literal meaning of the text, and to give priority to reality over the text." At the same time, he aimed to work "against the misconception that Islamic legislation is a literal, doctrinal, sacrificing public interests; Cruel that knows nothing but stoning, killing, flogging, torture, amputation of hands, crucifixion, hanging on the trunks of palm trees, cutting off hands and from opposite sides, and imposing unbearable burdens. Also, among our tragedies is the departure of some contemporary Islamic movements from the literal text and the application of its slogans about the sovereignty of God and the application of Islamic law and the Islamic alternative without care for a renewed reality or gradual change". Thus, he wanted to re-read the text "according to the spirit of the age and to discover its structure in analyzing the feeling."

However, in all cases, Hassan Hanafi did not address the problem of reality in his research and study and its relationship to the text. Rather, he remained stuck in researching the topics of the principles of jurisprudence, especially the formalities of the books of this science and their titles throughout the ages, as in the first part of his aforementioned book.

Hanafi's approach can be considered an extension of the traditional method, as he developed his project around "heritage and renewal," placing it in the context of "heritage", which he wanted to be the successor to the book "Al-Mughni Fi Abwab Al-Tawheed Wal-'Adl" or

"Al-Muhit Bitaklif" by the Mu'tazili judge Abdul Jabbar Al-Hamadani, considering his project development of the "natural rational current of Mu'tazilism, with the introduction of the element of revolution and liberation upon it, which are gains in our contemporary life". This aligns with the project's label of "heritage and renewal," as it was not primarily intended to understand the religious discourse as a central strategy.

Nevertheless, in this project, there are some indications that we happened to find consistent with what we tend to do in principle, despite the difference in detail, especially in what he called for regarding "reality" as a methodological basis for interpretation and consideration. There is full awareness that appears for the first time on the methodological level based on "reality" in the face of both reason and text.

There are also some others who built their approach on the methodology and grasping of the overall system of Islamic thought as a basic concern through which it is possible to control the joints of thought and determine its directions, using epistemic criticism, even if they do not focus on the problem of understanding religious discourse, and have only expressed radical criticism of the intellectual and ideological institutions that have formed and operated, as is the case with Mohammad Abed Al-Jabri's project, which we consider to be the most mature scientific project for dealing with heritage at the methodological level, due to his interest in that approach of grasping the ropes of Arab-Islamic thought, which led us to export an independent book to address what he presented from his project, which is the book "Critique of Arab Reason on the Balance". As for what this thinker has recently presented about understanding discourse, specifically about the Qur'an in its two parts, the introduction, and the understanding, it is not considered something important that deserves mention and treatment compared to his previous methodological project.

Despite the existence of such projects, the Arab and Islamic world still lacks a comprehensive and methodical organization of Islamic thought that takes into account the strategy of understanding discourse as a primary and fundamental task. Therefore, there is also a lack of consideration in developing epistemic possible plans to formulate new methodological perceptions of the totality system, to overcome the crises of thought and stand as General entities competing with the rooted parties that have played their cognitive role for many centuries.

In general, the course of contemporary thought follows in many of its aspects the general thinking spirit of the cognitive systems in heritage, as it often does not provide a comprehensive approach to understanding religious discourse directly, rather intends to organize as a follower and supporter of an aspect of this heritage, even if what this regularity target follows the general spirit, not the joints, in contrast to the method that prevailed in the same heritage, as the concern was defined by the joints, not the general spirit of thinking.

Contemporary thought is often divided between followers of Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, the Mu'tazilah, and others. In this division, it is not concerned with epistemic joints as much as it is concerned with the general spirit of thinking. It is as if what was absent or weak in the past has become present today. All of this is due to the present ideological motives and power, consciously targeting renaissance and change through processes of alignment with aspects of heritage. As if the contemporary trend resorted to the past as a link to unlock the present, contrary to Marx's approach, which made the latter's analysis a bridge to open the past, similar to what the geologist James Hutton said during the eighteenth century: "the present is the key to the past."

As for the current traditional approaches, they have continued to rely on the past, as it is, and they are divided by the division of the heritage itself. Or it can be said that the systematic division of heritage remained unchanged. The present still embodies the division of traditional thought. There is philosophical thought, as adhered to by

some currents in Iran, as well as Sufi thought in Iran, Turkey, and some Arab countries such as Egypt, Sudan, and Morocco. In addition to the textualist Salafi thought, as in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and others, there is also rational fundamentalist thought present in many Islamic countries, such as Egypt, Iraq, and others.