Islamic Modernism: A Legitimate Part of a Historical Tradition of Islamic Thought

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The topic of this paper is Islamic modernism, an important school of thought within modern Islam, a source of inspiration for various current progressive movements and individual intellectuals across the Muslim world. A brief introductory definition of Islamic modernism with the description of its place in the context of traditional Islamic thought is followed by an example of three noteworthy representatives of this tendency to illustrate the typical feature of Islamic-Modernist argumentation: the return to the essential sources of Islam, namely Qur'ān as the Word of God (*Allāh*) to enable the reinterpretation of certain deeply rooted norms of traditional approach to this religion and its legal system. My point of departure is a thesis that Islamic modernism is a fully authentic ideological direction within the framework of the broad historical tradition of Islam and that those Western scholars, who used to claim that any and all modernist tendencies in Islam were formed exclusively by Western liberalism, were wrong. This paper is a part of broad research of Islamic modernism focusing especially on its Egyptian branch.

[islamic modernism; modern islam; Egypt; reform; emancipation of women; islam and politics; religious tolerance]

The topic of this paper is Islamic modernism, an important school of thought within modern Islam, a source of inspiration for various current progressive movements and individual intellectuals across the Muslim world.[1] A brief introductory definition of Islamic modernism

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1 No agreement has been reached on precise dating of Islamic modernism, all dates are mere approximations. The definitions include the shortest period of 1875–1925 and a broader one of 1840–1940. From the second half of the 20th century Islamic modernism is followed up by heterogenic tendencies under various general titles (Liberal Islam, Reform Islam, Progressive Islam, Neomodernism, etc.). The terminology is rather vague partially also because of ideological variability of these tendencies. Some authors even define Islamic modernism as a very broad range of reformist branches within Islam since the first decades of 19th century up to the present.

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Together with Islamic fundamentalism, Islamic modernism belongs to the central branches of reformist tendencies in modern Islam. In the course of 19th century almost all territories of the vast "Islamic world" observed the effects of enormous scientific and social progress in Europe. Gradually this progress resulted in clear political dominance of Europe over technologically lagging non-European regions to finally culminate as Western colonialism and imperialism. Proponents of a rather heterogenic group identified by the Western Orientalists somewhat simplistically as Islamic modernists were among the first to warn the Muslim society of this unfavourable situation. Ideas of Islamic modernism started to crop up to various extent and intensity in almost the whole Muslim world, from sub-Saharan Africa and the Balkans to south-east Asia. For obvious reasons modernist movement was the most active in Egypt and India, the two main centres of Islamic thought in modern times. Led by their effort to avert decay of Muslim societies they required a reform of contemporary (in their opinion deformed) Islam and general social practices so these would be more in line with the spirit of modernity. Many facets of such religious and social reform were identical with values of Western liberalism (stressing individual rights and freedoms, emancipation of women, religious tolerance, accountable governments, education reform and general scientific and technical progress). Its founding fathers saw in this reform a return to the values of "pure Islam" whose genuineness had suffered over the long periods of Muslim history due to multiple "non-Islamic" elements and irrational cultural customs that were harming

the society. The modernists claimed to be the true Muslims but quite often their conservative and traditionalist opponents blamed them for atheism (*ilhād*) and for attempts of Westernization (*taghrīb*) of Islam and of Muslim societies. It seems paradoxical that this view of Islamic modernists has also been adopted by many representatives of Western colonialism, critics of Islam from amongst Christian missionaries and even shared by quite a few Orientalists, almost to this day. After all, to varying extent and on various intellectual levels of public debate going on in many Western countries, Islam is still being labelled as a religion incompatible in its nature with the requirements of modern time.

Islamic modernism, as a broadly structured and intrinsically heterogenic branch, represents one of the reformist tendencies within Islam, which have been resurfacing throughout history during various times and within various contexts. All these tendencies strive to return to the "core" of Islamic religion incorporated in its sacred sources, the "genuine" application of which would help resolve the issues of a given historical period. The Islamic modernists of course did not view themselves as agents of change and adaptation of Islam to the requirements of modern time. They presented themselves as sincere Muslims striving to revive the spirit of original Islam unblemished by centuries of "non-Islamic" elements. For them, Islam was the right ideological framework and guideline for the life of Muslims at any time. Modernists perused classical Islamic terms like *islāh* (reform), *tajdīd* (reconstruction), or *ihyā* (revival). These terms were used to return to Qur'ān and *sunna* (Islamic tradition), and reinterpret them.[2] Islamic modernism could be also viewed as a more open and tolerant alternative of Islamic fundamentalism. Modernists shared some of the points of departure with fundamentalists and both groups often used identical concepts, but they are arriving at starkly different conclusions.[3]

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[2] S. HAJ, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition. Reform, Rationality, and Modernity*, Stanford 2009, pp. 7–8.

[3] There are those who, due to their attitude, belong to both categories, yet, Muhammad Rashīd Ridā (1865–1935), one of the most controversial figures in modern Islamic thinking, is an example of such thinkers. Born in today's Lebanon, then worked in Cairo, he was the disciple (and biographer) of Muhammad ᶜAbduh, initially fully subscribing to the legacy of his modernist ideas. In later years he gravitated more and more to conservatism and Arab nationalism, ardently defending the restauration

Rather than clinging to the letter of the sacred texts and often rigid legal norms modernists focused on ethical values contained therein. Sacred sources of Islam inspired them to seek creative solution of modern time issues. With the proceeding economic and political dominance of the West over the Islamic world Muslims were facing modern ideas, values and phenomena, like e. g. constitutionalism, nationalism, civil society, religious freedom, modern science and ways of education, emancipation of women, etc. Islamic modernists were against both secular "adaptationism" of the "Westernized" Muslims ready to "betray" their religious and cultural roots, and conservative "rejectionalism" of traditionalists who automatically reject all modern achievements and inspiration from non-Muslims. Islamic modernists highlighted dynamism and flexibility typical for early Islam and went through a process of internal self-criticism, striving to redefine traditional Islam so they could prove its applicability under transformed conditions.[4] They saw the tension between Islamic faith and modernity as a consequence of historical development, not as the inherent nature of Islam.[5] Returning to sources of Islam, Qur'ān and partially *sunna* and using the method of *ijtihād* (rational reasoning),[6] they attempted to reinterpret some norms and regulations of traditional Muslim society they saw as outdated and non-applicable. Some modernists were of course more or less influenced by the ideas of European Enlightenment, several of them had even lived in the West for a period of time. However this influence that had been so often overemphasized in the past cannot be used to misinterpret their thought as

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of the caliphate.

[4] J. L. ESPOSITO, *Islam, the Straight Path. Expanded Edition*, New York – Oxford 1991, p. 126.

[5] Ch. KURZMAN (ed.), *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940. A Sourcebook*, New York 2002, p. 4.

[6] *Ijtihād* in Islamic jurisprudence is an independent opinion of an authorized scholar when interpreting a certain religious (in the broadest sense of the word) issue, especially if there is no clear answer provided in the basic sources of Islam. In Sunnī Islam since 10th century, there were four authorized orthodox schools of jurisprudence and the prevailing opinion stated that "the gates of *ijtihād* are closed" (despite the fact that this was not consistently followed in practice). In Shīca Islam on the other hand *ijtihād* has always been considered a legitimate tool for religious interpretation. In the Sunnī world *ijtihād* enjoyed rehabilitation thanks to the 19th century reformism headed by Muhammad cAbduh (1849–1905). The opposite of *ijtihād* is *taqlīd*, blind respect of and submission to old authorities, no attempts for independent solution of a religious issue.

non-Islamic. Drawing inspiration from foreign cultures and its transformation to fit the religious framework had been typical for Islam from its beginnings.

In further parts of this article I plan to introduce arguments typical for Islamic modernism on an example of three of its Egyptian representatives. I shall dwell on Qāsim Amīn reform ideas concerning female emancipation, on ᶜAlī ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq contribution concerning the relationship between islam and politics and on Mahmūd Shaltūt modernistic exposure on the problems of religious tolerance and legitimate violence. Despite the fact that we are dealing here with diverse themes presented by quite diverse personalities, I mean to emphasize an inherent Islamic substance of their modernist approach, based on – in a context of a historical tradition of Islamic thought – the fully legitimate reform reinterpretation of Qur'ān as the central source of the religion of Islam.

Qāsim Amīn: Emancipation of Women in Islam

Status of women in Islam is one of the "immortal" topics in polemics between Western critics of this religion and its Muslim apologists. There is a lively debate about it in the Muslim world as well, with a gamut of competing concepts and opinions on desirable position of women in society.[7] Egypt is considered the birthplace of modern movement for emancipation of women in the Arabic as well as Muslim world in general. Qāsim Amīn (1865–1908) is considered the "founding father" of Egyptian feminist movement. This lawyer, who had previously lived in France, aroused a scandal amongst Egyptian intellectuals in 1899 when his book *The Liberation of Woman* (*Tahrīr al-mar'a*), was published. Using an Islamic point of view he called for reforms in female clothing, isolation of women, marriage, divorce and education of women. These reforms were the necessary means to improve the status of Egyptian women in society and in the family. His book gained popularity among thriving Egyptian bourgeoisie and lib-

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[7] There is a wealth of sources in the literature on the status of women within Islam and in Muslim society, cf. e.g. L. AHMED, *Women and Gender in Islam. Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven – London 1992; R. RODED (ed.), *Women in Islam and the Middle East. A Reader*, London 2008; W. WALTHER, *Women in Islam. From Medieval to Modern Times*, Princeton 1993; A. A. ENGINEER, *Rights of Women in Islam*, 3rd Edition, New Delhi 2008.

eral intellectuals but also attracted the wrath of the ruling class, traditionalist religious scholars (ᶜ*ulamā'*) and conservative nationalist activists. The publishing of *The Liberation of Woman* was followed by a number of books and papers filled with arguments against Amīn's propositions. Amīn responded a year later in his next book called *The New Woman* (*al-Mar'a al-jadīda*) where he further elaborated his ideas.

In this book Amīn proposes a postulate about a direct link between the general decline of Egyptian (Muslim, Eastern) society with the low status of women. He argues that similarly as the quality of tradition is in direct proportion to the quality of nation's civilization, the same applies to the status of women. In advanced nations women have started to overcome social barriers between themselves and men, whereas in nations based on rigid family or tribal relations or in despotic regimes the status of women remains low. Amīn acknowledged that Muslim world lags behind the Western civilization but despite the assertions of Christian missionaries and Western critics of Islam, he did not see Christianity as a contributing aspect. He did not see any relation between Christianity and the level of progress achieved by contemporary Western world, or the progress in the status of women, since Christianity has not provided any norms or principles that would have helped to achieve that progress. In an idealistic way Amīn defines Islam as the first religion and a legal system that brought women true freedom and liberation, introducing gender equality (except for polygyny which was justifiable in those times), allowed women the same rights in disposing of property and, unlike men, stripped them of the care to provide for the family. In his opinion the current low status of Muslim women was totally contradictory to the laws and principles of Islam. In Amīn's view the genuine cause of the backwardness was a combination of superstition, traditions and folk customs which the Muslims mistook for Islam.[8]

Amīn believes that failing to utilize the potential of 50 percent of the population is affecting the society. While Western women were already contributing their share to science, literature, art, commerce or industry, the Egyptian woman in Amīn's eyes was just a burden for the society. Ignorant woman is seen as a victim of her emotions,

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[8] Q. AMĪN, Tahrīr al-Mar'a, in: M. ᶜIMĀRA (ed.), *Qāsim Amīn. Al-Aᶜmāl al-kāmila*, al-Qāhira 1989, pp. 322–328.

unable to make any rational decisions in relations with other people and often resorting to intrigues.[9] The situation among the upper and middle class bourgeoisie was the worst. Countrywomen in spite of their ignorance were partners to their men at home and in the field, but the city women lacking education were unable to cope with issues of modern housekeeping. The worst according to Amīn was their inability to properly raise their offspring. This generated a vicious circle where men despised women and the women were not given the tools to succeed in what was expected of them.[10]

Amīn regarded doubts whether education of girls is in line with Islamic law (sharīᶜa), as unfounded or downright harmful. For children and indeed the whole nation to grow and prosper Amīn sees it a necessity that women achieve at least basic education including reading and writing and grasping the basics of arts and science, they should also know about the latest findings in modern science and apply these in household management.[11] Outside home women can work as teachers or nurses but they could also enter other professions according to Amīn. Despite deeply rooted prejudice of many Egyptian men education could help make Egyptian women more virtuous and enhance their moral integrity. Amīn pointed to the chastity and virtuousness of Western women in Egypt compared to the somewhat loose, lazy and gossipy Egyptian women.[12] Trusting that woman's ignorance will ensure her chastity in Amīn's view is the same like "*a blind person is leading another blind person down a path and both fall into the first hole in the ground*".[13]

Amīn was against Muslim women covering their face, this to him is a non-Islamic custom taken over by the Muslims from other ancient

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9 Ibidem, pp. 330–333.
10 Ibidem, pp. 334–340.
11 Ibidem, pp. 329–330.
12 It is quite rare among Muslim thinkers to come across such appreciation of morals and integrity of Western women like in the work of Amīn. Even Rīfāᶜa Rāfic at-Tahtāwī, a prominent Egyptian reformist and admirer of Western civilization, dispraised alleged frivolity of Western (specifically French) women, cf. R. R. AL-TAHTAWI, *An Imam in Paris. Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric, 1826–1831* (Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz aw al-Dīwān al-Nafīs bi-Īwān Bārīs), introduced and translated by D. L. NEWMAN, London 2011, pp. 180–182.
13 AMĪN, p. 349.

cultures.[14] By quoting the Qur'ān verse 24:31, *hadīth* (the Prophetic tradition), where Muhammad speaks on the issue of female clothing as well as opinions of Muslim religious authorities he is bringing evidence that covering the face exceeds the *sharīʿa* rules. It also brings problems in everyday life both for the woman and for the whole society, on top God in Qur'ān states clearly that religion should not be an unnecessary burden for people (Qur'ān, 22:78). A covered face is no guarantee of morals, since honesty of a person depends on moral integrity. Whenever a man or a woman find themselves in temptation they should according to Qur'ān (Qur'ān, 24:31) avert their eyes. Amīn concludes that there is no more reason for the woman to cover her face than for the man.[15]

Amīn also condemns segregation of women and their isolation in their homes.[16] He refused to endorse the opinion that after reaching a certain age women can be further educated in their homes separated from the outside world. Such isolation affects mental and physical health of women who are not exposed to sun and wind. Amīn supports his argument that freedom helps enhance morality by pointing to Western (especially American) as well as Egyptian Bedouin and countrywomen who in his opinion have higher moral standards than isolated city women. Morality, Amīn says, is a question of choice, not coercion and the possibility of committing adultery in no way justifies the isolation of women. Amīn concludes: "*An intelligent person will see that whichever tools a man should apply to watch over his wife will not help him unless he wins over her heart.*"[17]

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[14] Prior to colonialism in Egypt Christian and Jewish women veiled their faces as well. The reason given was religious but in fact it was more of a cultural norm. Paradoxically enough the West perceives the covering of females as a symbol of oppression of women and a sign of barbarism, thus "Islamizing" this ancient custom. Thus, in modern and contemporary Muslim movements protesting against Western cultural domination the veil has almost become an instrument of differentiation of Islam from the rest of the society or it is almost viewed as a symbol of resistance.

[15] AMĪN, pp. 350–359.

[16] Idling away behind closed doors of home in isolation from the outside world was the ideal of female lifestyle in 19th century Egypt. Some authors stereotyped this ideal as a common practice, yet it was largely limited to so called harem women who belonged to the highest classes. Those made up only about 2 % women in Egypt, cf. S. ABDEL KADER, *Egyptian Women in a Changing Society*, 1999–1987, Boulder – London 1987, p. 17.

[17] AMĪN, pp. 359–373.

Amīn rejected the view of some Islamic scholars (^c*ulamā'*, sg. ^c*ālim*), that marriage is "*a contract that gives the man the right to sleep with a woman*" as a crude vulgarization of the noble concept of marriage based on mutual love and support, found in Qur'ān (Qur'ān, 30:21). Amīn sees as a precondition for love that the man and the woman marry after a thorough reflection, when they got to know each other and are sure about their mutual physical and spiritual attraction. Amīn sharply criticized the habit of arranged marriages where the woman had no right to protest the decision of her family.[18] He also criticized polygyny, especially from the moral point of view.[19] Only a monogamous man is able to fulfil the rights of his wife and his children, provide for them, care for them and love them. Qur'ān does legalize polygyny (Qur'ān, 4:3) but at the same time warns from it (Qur'ān, 4:129). Unlike ancient times polygyny has no grounds in an advanced society, here its negatives prevail and it brings about moral disintegration of the family. Amīn would allow for a polygynous marriage only in such exceptional cases like infertility of the first wife.[20]

Amīn disapproved of the high divorce rate in Egyptian society. The Christian concept of absolute inadmissibility of divorce was however strange to him as it ignores in his opinion the nature and needs of people. The Islamic concept of divorce based on Muhammad's statement: "*Out of all that is allowed God sees divorce as the most deplorable act*", was the absolutely wisest in his opinion. He quoted Qur'ān verses on divorce (Qur'ān, 2:228, 4:19, 4:34–35, 4:128, 65:1–2) and inferred that breaking-up of marriage is not to be taken lightly since it is linked with the essential issues family relations or inheritance. Amīn drafted a legal regulation for divorce based on the *sharī^ca* model that would make it more formal and provide the judge with a more active role in his effort to avert it, to engage arbiters from the families of the husband and wife and to ensure the presence of witnesses if the divorce judgment is

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[18] Ibidem, pp. 387–391.

[19] Polygyny (mostly limited to maximum two wives) was a relatively rare phenomenon at the end of the 19th century Egypt, found almost exclusively in higher strata of society, cf. M. BADRAN, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation. Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Princeton – New Jersey 1995, p. 6. In spite of its marginality (the usual statistics say that about 1–2 % of all marriages in Muslim world are polygynous) polygyny represents one of the key points of contention between the critics of Islam and Muslim apologists.

[20] AMĪN, pp. 393–397.

to be final. Amīn did wish to reduce divorce rate in Egypt but he also required that it must be made easier for the women to obtain divorce because under current conditions it was almost impossible for them.[21]

In *The New Woman* Amīn confirmed his earlier standpoints but this book was still rather different. Amīn swerved from his original Islamic modernist arguments to secular arguments focusing on the idea of liberation of women as a precondition for liberation of the entire society. He compared the arguments of opponents of women's liberation to those of despotic oriental rulers against the freedom of speech in their countries.[22] The book contains a wealth of references to modern intellectual and scientific findings. The Western society model is openly plotted out as a model suitable for Egypt or even the whole Muslim world.

Qāsim Amīn was aware of the need to provide a theoretical argument to refute a factual accusation that he is a traitor of Islam due to his pro-Western opinions. In *The Liberation of Woman* he was stressing Islamic legitimacy describing his requests as an effort to return to the genuine spirit of *sharīʿa*. In *The New Woman* he is openly declaring that using inspirations from modern West even such that would not be limited only to mere reception of technological achievements and scientific discoveries is the only way for Egypt and the Muslim world to attain progress. The success of Islamic civilization during ancient caliphate times in Baghdad or Cordoba may be used as a source of inspiration. But they should not be viewed uncritically as a climax of all human achievement. The fact that Islam is a truthful religion does not imply that Islamic civilization must be the best that there ever was. Amīn violated all conventions as soon as he challenged spiritual and moral supremacy of the Eastern and especially Muslim societies over the West.[23] He labelled such claims, popular among Muslims, as prejudicial, biased and serving merely as a misguided attempt to overcome one's own inferiority complex face to face to the material lead of the West.

While conservative nationalists like Mustafā Kāmil or Talʿat Harb viewed the whole idea of emancipation of women as just another con-

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[21] Ibidem, pp. 397–410.

[22] Q. AMĪN, Al-Marʾa al-jadīda, in: M. ʿIMĀRA (ed.), *Qāsim Amīn. Al-Aʿmāl al-kāmila*, al-Qāhira 1989, p. 486.

[23] AMĪN, *Al-Marʾa al-jadīda*, pp. 500–510.

spiracy aiming at weakening of the Egyptian nation and at infiltrating Egyptian society with the filth and decadence prevailing in the West,[24] at the time of his case and during the following decades Amīn was receiving a relatively broad acclaim by Egyptian liberal nationalist and feminist intellectuals.[25] After all, Egyptian feminists view him to this day as their "founding father". One such feminist organization in Egypt adopted in 1986 *al-Mar'a al-jadīda* as their title to honour Amīn's legacy.[26] In their vast majority Orientalists initially revered Amīn and his work, recent decades saw a more critical approach to his work and his overall contribution to the women's liberation movement in Egypt.[27]

It is not easy to provide an unequivocal assessment of Amīn as such. He was undoubtedly very pro-Western on one hand and his arguments bore the influence of the giants of modern Western thinking like Karl Marx (1818–1903), Charles Darwin (1809–1882), Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) and others. Amīn also draws on Islamic modernism, his inspiration by the foremost personages of this branch Jamāluddīn al-Afghānī and Muhammad ʿAbduh allows no space for doubts. In spite of his pro-Western inclination he remained a staunch Egyptian nationalist and to label him as a collaborator with British colonialism was downright unjust. Reforms he proposed were not especially radical or original given the spirit of his time.[28] In contrast to other Egyptian Islamic modernists he was radical in preaching absolute theoret-

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[24] ABDEL KADER, pp. 62–64.

[25] Ch. C. ADAMS, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt. A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad ʿAbduh*, London 1933, pp. 231–234.

[26] N. AL-ALI, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East. The Egyptian Women's Movement*, Cambridge 2004, p. 56.

[27] Leila Ahmed (Laylā Ahmad) (American scholar of Egyptian background) delivered perhaps the harshest criticism of all of Amīn's work. She branded Amīn as a misogynous "son of British colonialism", whose true objective was to replace the Islamic style male dominance in Egypt by the Western style male dominance, cf. AHMED, pp. 144–168.

[28] Cf. ʿIMĀRA (ed.), pp. 124–131. It seems likely that Amīn borrowed and incorporated in his book many of ʿAbduh's arguments and especially ʿAbduh's interpretation of Qur'ān in relation to veil, marriage, polygyny or divorce. This lessens somewhat the importance of Amīn's work from the religionist point of view. Yet it is necessary to note that from the viewpoint of the tradition of (not only) Muslim scholars in the past, such "plagiarism" or a lack of originality was not perceived negatively but as a contribution to the spreading of the specific ideas. Amīn definitely deserves the merit for making the public aware of these ideas.

ical separation of Islam as a religious system (*dīn*) from Islamic civilization (*hadāra*). He also deserves credit for how clearly he was able to express the feelings of a certain portion of Egyptian middle class which has started to establish itself at a time when due to transformed social conditions very large family households started to be perceived as a harmful anachronism and "*the former homosocial harem was to be replaced by heterosexual nuclear family*".[29] Even if Qāsim Amīn is not to be seen as the founder of Islamic feminism he was certainly somebody who helped to kindle a stormy debate that goes on until now, in the whole Egyptian society, on emancipation of women.

ᶜAlī ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq: The Separation of Islam and Politics

Based on his reinterpretation of Qurʾān and applying his revisionist take on historical events surrounding the formation of Islam the renowned Islamic lawyer ᶜAlī ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq introduced a theoretical divide between religion and politics. In his book *Islam and the Fundamentals of Authority* (*al-Islām wa usūl al-hukm*) published in 1925 at the time of exacerbated debates on the future of caliphate he renounced the traditional views of Muslim scholars that Islam, among others, sets out an ideal model of government. In Egypt the book caused a scandal and resulted in persecution of ᶜAlī ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq and his temporary withdrawal from public life. Defending secular ideas was not the worst, in those times Egypt had already had its fill on those. But for ᶜAlī ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq as a religious authority to pursue his teaching using Islamic arguments and the classical Islamic language, that was a genuine scandal. This "*malicious attack against his own people*" unleashed the wrath of the orthodox religious establishment. Disciplinary proceedings at the al-Ahzar University resulted in his banishment from the rows of Egyptian *ᶜulamāʾ*.[30]

In his book ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq deals with the issues of caliphate challenging the prevailing view of medieval scholars that caliphate (*al-khilāfa*) is the religiously binding institution representing the Islamic community (*umma*). He quotes the views of Muslim authorities that it is the duty (*wājib*) of *umma* to establish a caliphate and to disobey

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[29] HAJ, p. 155.
[30] On al-Azhar trial with ᶜAlī ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq see L. BINDER, *Islamic Liberalism. A Critique of the Development Ideologies*, Chicago 1988, pp. 144–146.

a caliph is equal to disobeying God.[31] Ibn Chaldūn (1332–1406) and many other scholars saw the main evidence of the binding nature of caliphate in the consensus (*ijmāᶜ*) reached amongst Muhammad's followers upon Muhammad's death, that Abū Bakr shall become a caliph, i. e. the head of the Muslim community who will prevent an outbreak of chaos[32] amongst the (religious) people. The main problem for ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq is the lack of reliable evidence of the binding nature of caliphate in Qur'ān or *sunna*: "*If there was but one evidence in the whole Book, ᶜulamā' would never hesitate tio quote it and glorify…*"[33] For him a caliphate is an entirely mundane institution, the same as a kingdom and he challenges the validity of *ijmāᶜ* about it. From a historical point of view he sees it as an establishment based solely on power and oppression.[34] Any and all references to political authority in Qur'ān or *sunna* that might be viewed as supportive of a caliphate cannot be in any way interpreted as a call for starting some form of successorship of the Prophet Muhammad. This includes the well-known verse: "*O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the messenger and those of you who are in authority!*" (Qur'ān, 4:59),[35] quoted by the advocates of caliphate, which does not call, according to this interpretation, for establishing some novel form of political authority.

This was a steppingstone to the essential question, whether Prophet Muhammad was or was not the founder of a Muslim state in Medina and whether he was its first ruler, as the majority of Muslims believe. ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq points out that it is necessary to strictly differentiate between the function of a prophet and a ruler. The fact is that the vast majority of well-known prophets were not rulers. Jesus was one such

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[31] ᶜA. ᶜABD AR-RĀZIQ, *Al-Islām wa Usūl al-Hukm. Bahth fī al-Khilāfa wa al-Hukūma fī al-Islām*, al-Qāhira 1925, pp. 2–4.

[32] Chaos broke out in the Muslim community after Prophet Muhammad died, as to the appointment of a new leader. The dispute that started to simmer was promptly resolved by one of the most honorable members of the community ᶜUmar Ibn al-Chattāb, when he paid a traditional ancient Arabic tribute (*bajᶜa*) to the respected Abū Bakr, friend and father in law of the Prophet, later on the majority of Muslims followed his example and did the same. Cf., e. g., M. LINGS, *Muhammad. His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 345–348; M. H. HAYKAL, *The Life of Muhammad*, Kuala Lumpur 2008, pp. 541–550.

[33] ᶜABD AR-RĀZIQ, pp. 13–14.

[34] Ibidem, pp. 21–38.

[35] *The Meaning of the Glorious Quran* by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall (Hyderabad-Deccan 1938) is the source for all Qur'ān quotes in this paper.

classical example of a prophet who explicitly preached about being a subject of the Ceasar (Matthew 22:21). Did Muhammad happen to be one of the few exceptions of those who were prophets and kings at the same time?[36]

ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq admits that Muhammad as a Prophet had a somewhat unique position amongst his people but his authority was different from that of the mundane rulers. Both Qur'ān and *ahādīth* (reports about teachings and sayings of Muhammad) point to the superiority of a prophet that needs to be recognized by his people, who should obey and respect him. God said: *"We sent no messenger save that he should be obeyed by Allah's leave."* (Qur'ān, 4:64) A prophet may play a similar role as a monarch in defining the main policy orientation, but his main task, not shared with anybody, is to "touch the souls and unveil the hearts". It is clear that he is to regulate both every-day and otherworldly matters of his flock.[37]

ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq has no doubts that Muhammad established a unique religious community, became its head, preached unity and managed to achieve it before he died as an unchallenged leader. But there are many instances in Qur'ān that prove that Muhammad was not a custodian of Muslims (Qur'ān, in verses 4:80, 6:66–67, 6:106–107, 10:99, 10:108, 17:54, 25:43, 39:41, 42:48, 50:45, 88:21–22), he was not a founder of a specific form of government, his authority amongst his people originated purely from him being God's messenger on Earth.[38] ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq shows that there were various tribes living in various regions of Arabia, people speaking various dialects, bound by various political ties. All these became united through religion, the ethics of which the Prophet preached, they became brothers in faith. There is nothing that could lead us to believe that the Prophet would have intervened into the administrative and judicial system of individual tribes. But he did bring the Islamic order, rules and unity, all of which had a great effect on most aspects of life of peoples who adopted Islam. *"It might perhaps be said that this code of ethics, customs and laws brought by the Prophet, peace be upon him, for Arabic and non-Arabic communities alike were vast and numerous and referred to many aspects of life of these communities. There were regulations on punishment, the military, jihād, trade, lend-*

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[36] ᶜABD AR-RĀZIQ, pp. 48–50.
[37] Ibidem, pp. 65–67.
[38] Ibidem, pp. 67–72.

ing money, pawning things, fine behaviour in sitting, walking and speaking and many others. [...] *At a closer look however, it becomes apparent that all that has been introduced by Islam and what the Prophet taught the Muslims about social order, customs and ethical rules had nothing in common with any kind of political rule and with governing a mundane state.*"[39] Islamic faith, rituals or social rules are of a religious nature only and even if Arabs were linked by Islam, there were still differences between their political, social, economic and public life. According to ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq those who see the times of the Prophet as the times of political unity and harmony believe in myths.[40]

Thus Muhammad was a leader only through his role of God's messenger, a mere interpreter of God's will. It was for him only to "*convey (the message) plainly*" (24:54), he was a mere conveyer (*muballigh*, verses 5:92, 5:99, 13:40, 16:35, 16:82, 36:17 aj.), the bearer of good tidings (*mubashshir*, *bashīr*, verses 7:188, 17:105, 19:97, 25:56, 33:45–46, 34:28) and a warner (*mundhir*, *nadhīr*, verses 7:184, 7:188, 11:12, 13:7, 17:105, 19:97, 22:49, 27:91–92, 33:45–46, 34:28, 34:46, 38:65 etc.).[41] None of the political and military events that took place during Muhammad's life had anything to do with religion according to ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq. Muhammad's appeal was an appeal to God based on peaceful enlightening and on winning over the hearts of people. Power and coercion had no place there (Qur'ān, verses 3:20, 10:99, 16:125, 88:21–22). Did not God say clearly: "*There is no compulsion in religion.*" (Qur'ān, 2:256)[42] Muhammad was "the Seal of the prophets" and this is the reason why nobody else will ever play the same role as he did.

After the death of the Prophet the power went to a purely secular government but thanks to the extraordinary personal religious devotion of Abū Bakr the Muslims started to call him wrongly the successor of God's messenger (*chalīfat rasūl Allāh*) and this title was wrongly regarded as a religious function. Later on, after the introduction of classical monarchies on Muslim territories the rulers misused faith to protect themselves from potential rebellions and any revolt against the state system was proclaimed a revolt against God. By making the topic of caliphate the central Islamic dogma they committed a crime against

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[39] Ibidem, pp. 83–84.
[40] Ibidem, pp. 85–86.
[41] Ibidem, pp. 73–75.
[42] Ibidem, pp. 52–53.

Muslims and "led them astray". ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq believes that it is high time for Muslims to realize that Islam is offering them full freedom to choose the best possible form of government and public administration based on past experience and current situation and needs.[43]

The initial response to ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq's book in Egypt was largely negative. Those who defended him publicly were mostly using freedom of expression, guaranteed by the 1923 Constitution, as their main argument. However, none of these people would subscribe to the pivotal ideas in his book.[44] Only a few liberal intellectuals like Tāhā Husayn (1889–1973), Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888–1956) or Ahmad Amīn (1886–1954) did, at least partially, endorse his stance.[45] Muhammad Rashīd Ridā (1865–1935), the author of an influential work *The Caliphate or the Great Imamate* (*al-Khilāfa aw al-imāma al-ᶜuzmā*), contending that the Islamic state is the necessary precondition for the functioning of Muslim *umma*, could have taken ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq's book as a personal affront and denounced it in the conservative nationalist *al-Liwā'* (Flag) newspaper.[46] He asserted that this is the latest attempt of the enemies of Islam to weaken and paralyze Islam.[47] Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn (1876–1958), the rector of al-Azhar University in 1952–1954 labelled ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq as an alienated

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[43] Ibidem, pp. 95–103.

[44] I. GERSHONI – J. P. JANKOWSKI, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs. The Search of Egyptian Nationhood, 1900–1930*, Oxford 1987, pp. 67–68.

[45] S. T. ALI, *A Religion, not a State. Ali ᶜAbd al-Raziq's Islamic Justification of Political Secularism*, Salt Lake City 2009, p. 104.

[46] Ridā is sometimes regarded as the pioneer of the theory of modern Islamic state and his attitudes have strongly influenced political ideology of the Muslim brotherhood, be it in a modified form. He differentiated between the original ideal of caliphate and the way it was operated under the "rightly guided caliphs" (*al-khulafā' ar-rāshidūn*), and the contemporary "decadent" nature of Ottoman caliphate in which however he still saw the necessary institution protecting the *umma* from disintegration spurred on by foreign powers. In Ridā's view an ideal form of a caliphate would represent trends and branches of Islam with the caliph as the supreme interpreting authority of the faith (*mujtahid*). He called for improved relations between Arabs and Turks to revive the unity of *umma*. His attitude to the issue of caliphate reflects the differences between the concept of Islamic universalism and Arab nationalism as well as between religious idealism and political realism. On Ridā's concept of the Islamic state see H. ENAYAT, *Modern Islamic Political Thought. The Response of the Shīᶜī and Sunnī Muslims to the Twentieth Century*, London 2005, pp. 69–83; A. HOURANI, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939*, Cambridge 1983, pp. 239–244, etc.

[47] HOURANI, p. 189.

person fascinated by the West and its theoreticians, philosophers and Orientalists. His view of caliphate as a tyranny had been allegedly shaped by the negative perception in Europe of the Roman Catholic Church.[48]

It took many years for a more sober critical view of ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq's work to appear in Egypt, e. g. in the book by Muhammad ᶜImāra *Battle of Islam and the Fundamentals of Authority* (*Maᶜrakat al-Islām wa usūl al-hukm*, 1989). ᶜImāra appreciated ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq's contribution to Egyptian intellectual discourse but criticized alleged inconsistencies in the book in the way the people respected the Prophet's authority and the nature of Abū Bakr's leadership. The sharpest criticism aims at ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq's negative attitude to caliphate portrayed using only the dark aspects of its history, ignoring at the same time the host of noble postulates of the Islamic political theory. Absolutism described by ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq is remote from the original nature of Islam, it found its way there only through the Shīᶜa theory of imamate based on Persian feudalism or through the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) that adopted the Byzantine way of ruling in Damascus.[49]

It is not easy to assess ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq's contribution to modern Islamic thinking objectively. Even though he was rejected in his time, some of his ideas still keep resurfacing after dozens of years in unresolved disputes between the followers of "secular" or "Islamic" political trends in the Muslim world. To this day ᶜAlī ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq clearly remains outside the majority frame of Muslim thinking due to the way he challenged Islam's links with any political issues.[50] Claims about "Western" and "non-Islamic" origin of his ideas that allegedly aim at damaging Islam can be clearly rejected as biased and misconstrued. ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq's "Islamic secularism" represents one of the extreme forms of Islamic modernism that seeks within the Muslim world authentic answers to the contemporary challenges.

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[48] ALI, pp. 105–107.

[49] M. ᶜIMĀRA, *Maᶜrakat al-Islām wa usūl al-hukm*, al-Qāhira 1989, pp. 52–60.

[50] ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq had only a few programmatic followers in Egypt, those were liberal intellectuals like the renowned lawyer Muhammad Saᶜīd al-Ashmāwī (1932–2013) or the younger brother of the founder of Muslim brotherhood Jamāl al-Bannā' (1920–2013).

Mahmūd Shaltūt: Islam as a Religion of Peace and Tolerance
One cannot say that the Western world associates the religion of Islam with peace and tolerance. Some of Islam's detractors allege that the source of its intolerant and militant expressions is inherent in its very principle and sacred writings. The attitude of the Islamic law toward non-Muslims became systematized soon after the birth of Islam, at the time of the extraordinary Muslim military expansion. In the formative stages of Islamic history, converting non-Muslims was not the armed jihād's primary objective.[51] Rather, its purpose was the political unification of the territories conquered and governed by Islam.[52] The Islamic order tolerated religious diversity, and non-Muslims living in territories under Muslim rule enjoyed the status of protected persons (*ahl adh-dhimma*). As such, they were granted the protection of life and property, religious freedom, and substantial legal sovereignty in the internal affairs of their communities, provided they deferred to the political authority of the Islamic state, paid a special per capita tax (*jizya*), and accepted a degree of legal discrimination. Initially, the protected person status pertained only to Jews and Christians (*ahl al-kitāb* – People of the Book), i. e., members of the monotheistic religions. Later on, as Islam took over new territories, other non-Muslims (Zoroastrians in Iran, Hindus in India, etc.) gained the same protection.[53] Although the level of tolerance for members of other denominations in Muslim lands fluctuated with geographical position and the passage of time,

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[51] *Jihād* (striving in Arabic) is a classic term of Islamic legal science, often misunderstood by the Western public as well as some politicians and publicists as a synonym for holy war. In its broader sense, it means striving to strengthen the faith of an individual and society, and promote Islam. Typically, the four basic meanings of *jihād* are defined as *jihād* by the heart (*al-jihād bi-l-qalb*, striving for self-improvement, striving to be a better person and a better Muslim); *jihād* by the hand (*jihād bil yad*, i. e., charity work), *jihād* by the tongue (*jihād bil lisān*, i.e. spreading the word of Islam and identifying societal wrongs), and *jihād* by the sword (*jihād bis sayf*, i. e., armed war to defend Islam or its interests). There is a vast amount of nonfiction literature, mostly focused on its armed variations, such as M. BONNER, *Jihad in Islamic History. Doctrines and Practice*, Princeton – Oxford 2006; D. COOK, *Understanding Jihad*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2005; R. FIRESTONE, *Jihad. The Origin of Holy War in Islam*, New York – Oxford 1999. An anthropological study by G. MARRANCI, *Jihad Beyond Islam*, Oxford – New York 2006, offers a fresh and novel treatment of the topic.
[52] I. HRBEK – K. PETRÁČEK, *Muhammad*, Praha 1967, pp. 110–111.
[53] Y. FRIEDMANN, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam. Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition*, New York 2003, pp. 84–85.

non-Muslims' legal status was, with some exceptions, respected. It is safe to say their legal standing surpassed that of religious minorities in Medieval and Early Modern Europe.[54]

Today, however, in a world that aspires to the Enlightenment ideal of equality of people of all faiths, the relative open-mindedness of classical Islam seems troubling, especially to a Western mindset. While most traditionalist Muslim scholars treat the relationship of Islam to non-Muslims apologetically, modernist thinkers have scaled new interpretations of this facet of the Qur'ānic text, redefining some of the classic terms of Islamic law. Outstanding among these modernists is Egyptian Mahmūd Shaltūt (1893–1963), President of al-Azhar University from 1958 to 1963, and a prominent Islamic thinker of the 20th century.[55]

Shaltūt rejected religious coercion as indefensible not merely on spiritual grounds, but on rational ones as well. No one can truly respect, let alone have faith in something delivered to him by force. Islam, founded on purity and simplicity, has no reason to convert unbelievers through violence. Many places in the Qur'ān (Qur'ān, 2:256, 5:48, 6:35, 6: 125, 10:99, 11:28, 19:43–48, 24:54, 81:27–28 et al.) declare plainly that God does not want people to accept the faith under threat, but through learning and contemplation of its revelations.[56]

Of course, Shaltūt had to grapple with a number of Qur'ānic verses that call to battle against non-Muslims. Shaltūt does not admit to any inner inconsistencies within the Qur'ānic text, categorically repudiating the practice of the traditional exegetes who attempted to resolve alleged discrepancies by ascertaining that the later revealed verses on a certain topic were a "rewritten" version (*naskh*) of earlier verses (*mansūkh*). Treating Qur'ān as an organic entity, Shaltūt prefers to arrange all verses by a concrete topic and evaluate the connection between them. This method is especially critical for his interpretation of jihād. He postulates that armed jihād needs to be understood solely

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[54] B. LEWIS, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*, New York 1998, pp. 127–128.

[55] For more detailed information on Shaltūt's life and work, see M. ᶜIMĀRA, *Ash-Shaykh Shaltūt. Imām fī al-Ijtihād wa at-Tajdīd*, al-Qāhira 2011, pp. 43–59; K. ZEBIRI, *Mahmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism*, Oxford 1993, pp. 1–38.

[56] M. SHALTŪT, The Koran and Fighting, in: R. PETERS (ed.), *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, Princeton 2005, pp. 62–70.

as a defensive war.[57] In the times of Prophet Muhammad, the Muslim community turned to combat only after years of harsh oppression by the pagan Quraysh. It was then that God revealed the first "militant" verses (22:39–41), sanctioning active war on the part of those expelled from their homes and suffering religious persecution. Shaltūt argued that this verse pertained to Muslims as well as others, denouncing not only the destruction of mosques, but hermitages (*sawāmi*ᶜ), synagogues (*biya*ᶜ), and houses of worship (*salawāt*) in general. His interpretation of verses 2: 190–194, 4:75, 4:84, 4: 90–91, 8:39, 9:12–13, and 9:36 demonstrates that Muslims are forbidden to initiate hostility and aggression. Muslims must lay down arms as soon as fighting and enemy aggression stop. Then, religious freedom will flourish and no one will be victimized or tortured on the grounds of faith.[58]

All the above statements manifest that Islam is a religion that welcomes peaceful and friendly relations with the outside world, fostering collaboration with non-Muslim countries for as long as peace endures and agreements with these countries do not challenge Islam's basic principles. Shaltūt considered the Qur'ānic verses 60:8–9 to be the fundamental Islamic credo on international relations. When forced into war, Muslims may not bring on devastation, commit genocide, and slay women, children, the elderly and the infirm – in other words, civilians not engaged in aggressions against Muslims. In addition, subjecting prisoners to mistreatment such as food deprivation (76:8) is forbidden. Ending a war does not require the enemy to accept Islam. What is required is the cessation of hostilities and signing of a peace treaty protecting the rights of those who are oppressed.[59] The Qur'ān encourages Muslims to embrace the enemy's request for peace or truce, if it is sincere and credible (Qur'ān, 8:61–62). Muslims must abide by a fair accord (Qur'ān, 16:91–94).[60]

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[57] Analytically mature reform interpretations of armed jihād as a purely defensive reaction to religious oppression have appeared before Shaltūt. One example is Indian modernist scholar, Chirāgh Alī (1844–1895), see Ch. M. ALI, *A Critical Exposition of the Popular Jihād, Showing that all the Wars of Mohammad were Defensive, and that Aggressive War, or Compulsory Conversion, is not Allowed in the Koran*, Calcutta 1885.

[58] SHALTŪT, pp. 72–76.

[59] M. SHALTOUT, Islamic Beliefs and Code of Law, in: K. W. MORGAN (ed.), *Islam, the Straight Path. Islam Interpreted by Muslims*, Delhi 1987, pp. 128–129.

[60] SHALTŪT, *The Koran and Fighting*, pp. 92–93.

In the same spirit, Shaltūt regarded the relationship of Muslims to non-Muslims in an Islamic state. In his view, Islam is neither hostile nor hateful toward non-Muslims. Instead, it champions peaceful coexistence and cooperation in everyday life, striving toward the common good and mutual tolerance (Qur'ān, 42:15, 109:1–6). Non-Muslims living in an Islamic state must be assured freedom of belief and the liberty to practice sacred rituals and ceremonies in their own shrines. Non-Muslims are entitled to the same rights and have the responsibilities as Muslims. Belonging to a particular religion does not create social superiority. According to Shaltūt, the only thing Islam requires from non-Muslims is to refrain from attacks on Muslims and the Islamic way of life. Then they are free to preach and practice their religion.[61]

It is clear that Shaltūt's attitude towards non-Muslims in an Islamic state resembles the modern model of equality of all citizens before the law, and does not evoke the traditional discriminatory concept of *dhimma*. Even though this term appears in his texts, he explains it in a different way. In essence, Shaltūt dismantles the traditional Islamic division of non-Muslims into the "people of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*) and polytheists (*mushrikūn*). The only person seen as an infidel (*kāfir*) is one that has rejected the divine message willfully, out of hubris or selfishness. Conversely, the label of an unbeliever cannot be attached to a person ignorant of the message of Islam, one who was taught about Islam through hate, one not able to fully grasp it, or one who was capable of grasping it but died before being wholly persuaded. Such a person will not suffer eternal punishment in the afterlife, even if he had practiced no religion, because the Qur'ān only mentions infidelity (*kufr*) in context with obstinacy and arrogance.[62]

Apart from some general remarks on equal rights and responsibilities, Shaltūt refrained from elaborating on the particulars of the status of non-Muslims in Islamic society. In his idealistic rendering, the Islamic state was a paternalistic entity, protective of Muslims as well as all others. Based on the example of Prophet Muhammad, who in one

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[61] SHALTOUT, *Islamic Beliefs and Code of Law*, pp. 126–128. Of course, the given text here does not explain Shaltūt's attitude to the proselytizing activities by members of other religions among Muslims, which were extremely problematic from Islam's point of view.
[62] Ibidem, p. 92.

dispute between a Muslim and a Jew ruled in favor of the Jew, Shaltūt stated that before the righteous law of God, all people, "*black and white, strong and weak, Muslim and non-Muslim, rulers and subjects*" are equal. Occasionally, Shaltūt's claims become ambiguous. One example is his lauding the traditional discriminatory system of paying the *jizya* by non-Muslims as a testament to their loyalty to the state and the will to shoulder its financial burdens. Nowhere, however, does he suggest reintroducing this system in modern day Egypt.[63]

Shaltūt also offers a reformist interpretation of certain traditional *sharīʿa* concepts. One such instance is the legal analysis of a model case of a non-Muslim, murdered by a Muslim. Here, Shaltūt declares the sanctity of blood (*hurmat ad-dam*) of all humans, without exception, and the possibility of inflicting a punishment on the perpetrator (*qisās*). Among the traditional legal schools (madhhab, pl. madhāhib),[64] only the Hanafīya and Mālikīya allowed for this possibility.[65] Disagreeing with the interpretation of the term "brother" in the Qurʾānic verse 2: 178 on qisās as applying to Muslims only, Shaltūt regards it in its broader sense as a fellow human being.[66]

As an orthodox ʿālim, strictly adhering to the text of the Qurʾān, Mahmūd Shaltūt would neither distort its primary meaning nor thrust aside certain parts in favor of others. It is very nearly impossible to accuse him of lacking authenticity or erudition in the field of Qurʾānic exegesis. Unlike many a liberal Egyptian Muslim intellectual delivering reform ideas to a limited audience, Shaltūt was a household name (in and outside of Egypt), and widely respected at that. Perhaps this latter factor adds so much depth and significance to his interpretation of Islamic attitudes towards violence and non-Muslims. In the light of the present day upheavals, his vision of Islam as a religion of tolerance, peace, and cooperation among peoples and members of different creeds represents a noteworthy contribution to interfaith discourse.

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[63] ZEBIRI, pp. 71–72.

[64] For basic information on individual legal doctrines, see classical work J. SCHACHT, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, Oxford 1982, pp. 57–68.

[65] For classical legal discourse about *qisās* in the case of murder of a non-Muslim by a Muslim, see FRIEDMANN, pp. 39–53.

[66] ZEBIRI, p. 90.

Conclusion

In spite of earlier opinions of some Orientalists, the heterogenic ideological branch of modern Islam, referred to simply as Islamic modernism is indeed a "natural" and within Islam fully authentic search for satisfactory solution of various social issues faced by Muslim society in modern times. Islamic modernism is striving to justify Islam as a living religion under ever changing conditions, and not to displace it outside public sphere. In spite of varying degrees of influence by modern Western ideas based on European Enlightenment Islamic modernists formulate their reformist attitudes within categories of Islam referring to Qur'ān as the essential source for reinterpretation of certain "outdated" norms of classical Islamic jurisprudence or traditions and customs of Muslim societies.

This paper analyses the way three renowned Egyptian thinkers approach three essential issues faced by Muslims in modern times – the status of women in society, the relation of Islam and politics and the relation of Muslims and the non-Muslim world. The opinions of these three thinkers differ in many ways. They have a different degree of religious education, of personal experience with Western society and their reputation and the level of acceptance of their ideas by both Egyptian intellectuals and general public varied as well. Islamic modernism is not a homogeneous group and Islamic modernism has never been a monolith. Its basic common characteristic feature has always been the return to Qur'ān as a single primary valid source of Islamic religion that can be reinterpreted to arrive at harmony between Islam and the requirements of modern times. Such reinterpretation requires rejection of certain standard and general postulates or methods of traditional Islam. Qāsim Amīn was able to interpret Islam as a system favouring emancipation of women by factually rejecting the classical thesis on the interconnection of religion and civilization within Islam. ᶜAlī ᶜAbd ar-Rāziq rejected the political dimension of Islam and so provided for, on theoretical level, political secularization of Muslim societies without rejecting the validity of Islam and the significant role it plays in public life. Mahmūd Shaltūt rejected the traditional and by the majority of Muslim scholars accepted method of preference of the later revealed verses over the earlier revealed verses and replaced it with a method of accumulation and ordering of all verses on a given topic and analysing their mutual relations. Thanks to this method he
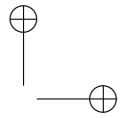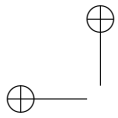
was able to interpret Islam as a highly tolerant religion that allows violent acts only in extreme cases of self-defence. Even though reinterpretation attempts of these thinkers involved different issues they all show that Islam can be reformed (despite frequent claims of the rigidity of Islam because of the specific status of Qur'ān as directly revealed God's word). Islamic modernism can be considered as one of the fully fledged reform branches of Islam that have been resurfacing in the course of history of this religion in various contexts, in various forms and that have brought various answers to many questions with varying effect and role they played in practical life of Muslim societies.