Reconciling Religion and Modernity in the Views of Motahhari and Fazlur Rahman

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Abstract

The encounter between Islam and the West during the modern period gave rise to new challenges regarding the relationship between religion and modernization, leading to intellectual debates among Muslim scholars. In an effort to reconcile the conflicts between religious traditions and the intellectual advancements of modernity, two distinct intellectual movements emerged: revisionist traditionalists and religious intellectualism. The former criticized the intellectual principles of modernity while adhering to orthodox theological and jurisprudential beliefs, whereas the latter embraced the epistemic core of modernity, including relativistic autonomous rationality and its associated theories, while questioning the theological and jurisprudential foundations of the religion. Consequently, each movement presented its own interpretation of religious rationality. This article aims to conduct a comparative study of Ayatollah Motahhari's views, representing the revisionist traditionalist approach, and the ideas of Fazlur Rahman, who adopts the religious intellectualist approach, in order to explore the compatibility between tradition and modernity.
Keywords: Religion, modernity, Motahhari, Fazlur Rahman, contextualism, ijtihad.

Statement of the Problem

The civilizational encounter between Islam and the West in the modern period has presented Muslim intellectuals with new challenges in social life. These challenges have given rise to important questions, including the factors contributing to Western progress and the decline of Islamic countries, the relationship between modernity and Islam, Islam's responses to the contemporary needs of human society, human rights, gender equality, Islamic criminal laws, the economic system and modern banking, as well as the role of art within the religious tradition. Muslim intellectuals have been grappling with these issues and striving to provide responses to them.

Overall, there have been two approaches to these problems: revisionist traditionalism and religious intellectualism.[2] In an effort to reconcile religion and modernity, they

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2. By revisionist traditionalists I refer to proponents of the discourse of political jurisprudential Islam,

endeavored to present a distinct model of religious rationality that aligned with the cultural and social requirements of present-day individuals, while also satisfying intellectual desiderata. Revisionist traditionalists embrace modern lifestyles and refrain from opposing modernity, while also upholding the orthodox theological and jurisprudential principles of their religious tradition. Their aim is to interpret these principles in a manner that aligns with the realities of contemporary life and the needs the time. Intellectuals like Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi, Muhammad Abduh, Ayatollah Motahhari, and Ayatollah Sadr are notable Muslim scholars who endeavored to develop fresh approaches to address present-day challenges while remaining rooted in the orthodox theological and jurisprudential framework.

Religious intellectualists, on the other hand, endeavor to reconcile religion and modernity by embracing the fundamental principles of modernity, such as relativistic autonomous rationality and its associated theories like historicism and humanism. Through this approach, they have developed new interpretations of religious doctrines that deviates from traditional orthodox beliefs while remaining in harmony with the principles of modernity. This approach represents an evolved iteration of a previous Islamic rationalist movement known as "neo-Muʿtazilism." Neo-Muʿtazilism aimed to reconcile revelatory doctrines with rational findings. Currently, certain religious doctrines are not acceptable to commonsensical reason and empirical sciences. It is argued that these doctrines originated within the historical context of revelation and may not be necessary to believe in light of contemporary circumstances. Consequently, religious scholars and intellectuals have the responsibility of purifying religion from such historical frameworks. Their goal is to develop a new understanding of religion and address the societal backwardness within Islamic society.

Religious intellectualists in the Islamic world have put forth the concept of historical Islam. On this perspective, certain religious doctrines and jurisprudential rulings are considered contextual, implying that they have expired culturally and socially. Consequently, adhering to these outdated beliefs would regress today's culture and reality back to the period of revelation (Abu Zayd 1383 Sh, 293). Intellectuals like Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Fazlur Rahman, and Hassan Hanafi have presented unique interpretations of religious rationality, aiming to reconcile religious doctrines with the cultural context of the time.

Morteza Motahhari is a prominent figure in revisionist traditionalist camp, while Fazlur Rahman stands out as an advocate of religious intellectualism. Although research has been done concerning the approaches of these two intellectuals to various religious topics, such as the interplay between reason and religion, the reconstruction

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advocating for the establishment of a government based on the orthodox method of ijtihad. It is important to distinguish this perspective from traditional Islam or traditionalist Islam as presented by certain authors. On the other hand, religious intellectualism pertains to advocates of modernist Islam who adhere to the principles of modernity (see Haghighat 1396 Sh, 514-16).

of ijtihad, and the historicity of Quranic doctrines, there has yet to be a comprehensive comparative study on how the social aspects of religion can be harmonized with the modern world. Conducting such a study could offer fresh insights into the connection between religious tradition and modernity.

It is noteworthy that by "religion" in this article I refer to Islamic teachings, particularly its laws, regulations, and norms, and by "modernity" I mean the contributions of the enlightenment philosophy, such as modern political and legal structures, modern economics, civil liberties, and cultural developments.

Motahhari's View

Motahhari (1920-1979) argued that the primary challenge faced by Muslim intellectuals today is reconciling "Islam and the demands of the time." According to him, this issue involves two pressing needs: firstly, the accurate understanding of Islam as a social philosophy, and secondly, the recognition of the contemporary requirements (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 21:21). He suggested that the conflict between religion and modernity can only resolved through the application of rationalism. Furthermore, he contended that Islam is tightly connected to reason, as it acknowledges reason as an autonomous source for deriving jurisprudential or legal rulings (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 3:190). Reason plays a crucial strategic role. On one hand, the enduring essence of religious doctrines, which remains constant throughout time, is deeply connected to the realities of life. On the other hand, reason alone has the capacity to uncover the underlying religious themes and their relevance to the dynamic challenges of life, leading to appropriate solutions. Consequently, in both theological and jurisprudential domains, reason serves as a yardstick for truth, alongside the Quran.

Motahhari argues that in order to address religious rationality within the field of divine law (sharia) and grasp the essence of Islamic rulings, which remains constant throughout time (1377 Sh, 21:161), the practice of ijtihad is essential (1377 Sh, 158). Ijtihad holds strategic significance as religious sources can be harmonized with the evolving demands of each era. The application of ijtihad plays a pivotal role in revitalizing religious thought. For religious individuals to present a viable model to non-religious societies, they must possess a vibrant and dynamic religious thinking (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 25:500). Motahhari not only emphasizes the importance of ijtihad in accordance with the demands of time and place but also highlights the dangers of adopting dogmatism or liberal ijtihad as extreme points on the spectrum of religious knowledge. He argues that both approaches can lead to misinterpretations of religious texts and misguided inferences of religious rulings. According to Motahhari, those who are overly cautious in matters of religion may tend towards dogmatism, but excessive caution and a failure to discern the needs and interests of the Islamic community can also result in misunderstandings of religion. Conversely, liberal ijtihad, which has been employed by some Muslim rulers throughout history, involves an ignorant manipulation

of religious laws. Motahhari contends that the problem with liberal ijtihad lies in its excessive reliance on common sense, which ultimately strips religion of its true essence. (1377 Sh, 21:71; 24:88). He says, "excessive modernism involves adding non-Islamic elements to the religion and removing Islamic elements from it in order to paint Islam with the color of the time and make it more appealing" (1377 Sh, 88).

Motahhari adheres to the conventional Islamic theological view that the Quranic revelation has a divine source and is not influenced by the cultural norms of its time. He believes that the Quranic teachings consist in knowledge received by the Prophet directly from the spiritual realm, which he was entrusted with conveying to humanity without any alterations or omissions. (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 21:120). Moreover, revelation contains trans-historical propositions. Thus, jurisprudential rulings can address the needs of all times, but through ijtihad, they can be adapted to the specific needs of each era (1377 Sh, 21:307).

Motahhari also believes that the Prophet's mission extended beyond the mere transmission of divine rulings. He argues that the Prophet was also responsible for establishing a government based on those rulings and administering the Islamic society in political, economic, and judicial domains (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 21:121).

Fazlur Rahman's View

Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), also known as Fazlur Rahman Malik, was a prominent advocate of religious intellectualism and was renowned for his modernist ideas about Islam, as well as his hermeneutic studies of the Quran. Like many other reformists in the Islamic world, Rahman grappled with two fundamental questions: (1) Why have Muslim-majority countries lagged behind the West in scientific, economic, political, and social advancements? (2) How can we strike a constructive balance between the demands of modern life and the preservation of the essence or spirit of religious thought and the legacy of Islamic civilization? Rahman attributed the decline of the Islamic world to the loss of rationalism and the prevalence of imitation over independent thought. In response to this, he argued that Muslims must embrace full-fledged ijtihad to understand the religion in a way that can effectively address the modern challenges facing the Muslim community. Rahman believed that Islamic philosophical thought has failed to engage creatively with the modern world, unlike contemporary philosophical movements. He argued that this failure was due to its neglect of rational thinking, which has also hindered the development of strategic theories necessary for the formation of a dynamic Islamic civilization. Thus, in response to the second question, Rahman advocated for the revival of authentic philosophical thinking in the Islamic world as a means of overcoming this problem. In his view, a main aspect of deploying philosophical thinking in the realm of religion is critical rationalism. He counts as a leading Muslim intellectual who tried to apply historical criticism to the domain of Islamic thought. He rejected traditional views and advocated for a revision of the Quran in hermeneutic terms to arrive at a new understanding of Quranic verses.

The starting point of Fazlur Rahman's religious reformation should be sought in his critical view of the Islamic theological principles as well as the accepted principles in Islamic jurisprudence, including the belief in revelation as the word of God. Against the mainstream Islamic view, he believes that the Quran is not God's word, but a product of the Prophet's encounter with the spiritual realm of the world, which is the sacred reality of being, as he states: "The Qurʾan is the divine response, through the Prophet's mind, to" a specific historical condition (Fazlur Rahman 1397a Sh, 16).

Like many other religious intellectuals, Rahman divided the teachings of the Quran and hadiths into two categories. The first category includes what he refers to as the essence, principles, universals, or ideals of the religion. These doctrines, which call people to faith and promote human values, are not tied to any particular time or place, but rather represent the essential core of the religion and are therefore trans-historical. Rahman's second category encompasses what he refers to as accidental (non-essential) doctrines, which are specific to the historical and cultural context of the time of revelation and served to fulfill the ideals of the religion as demanded by those circumstances. These doctrines are subject to change and are therefore historical. Based on this view, Rahman believed that the jurisprudential rulings of the Quran are not fixed or constant doctrines of the religion, but rather are tied to the historical frameworks of the religion and cannot be applied to events and developments of later periods without taking into account the changing circumstances. Rahman argued that to persist in enforcing Quranic laws based solely on the words of the text, without considering the social changes that have occurred and are visible in the modern world, would undermine the moral and social objectives of the Quran. (1397a Sh, 28).

Rahman argued that Muslim jurists made a critical mistake by treating the majority of Quranic content, including the penal laws (*hudud*), as we as the laws of family and transactions, as fixed doctrines of the religion. He believed that the primary mission of the Prophet was not legislation, but rather spiritual leadership of society and the institutionalization of human values, which were the essential elements of the religion. As the Prophet himself stated, "I was sent to perfect noble morals" (Majlisi, n.d., 16:210). Therefore, Rahman asserted that the Quran should not be treated as a book of law, but rather as a source of guidance for faith and morality, which constitutes the core message of the Quran.

Drawing upon this theory, Fazlur Rahman reconciles the jurisprudential doctrines of the religion and modernity. The findings of commonsensical reason in each era concerning political, social, cultural, and economic matter, which align with the essential doctrines of the religion and fulfil its general ideals of faith and moral values, count as the appropriate historical frameworks for those ideals and should be adopted in action, even if they differ from the established traditional religious styles. Since those findings materialize religious ideals, they will be as legitimate as the rulings stated by the Prophet. Examples of such commonsensical findings include the modern

political structures, modern laws and regulations, or social and cultural norms such as modern lifestyle. Thus, he believes in two threads within the religious tradition: the Quranic-Prophetic tradition and the living tradition or practice of Muslims. The former reports the events of the Prophet's era and his own legislations, and the latter pertains to the post-Prophetic era, as exemplified in the legislations made by the Prophet's companions, including the second caliph, as he revoked the Prophetic legal punishment for theft in times of starvation or emancipation of a slave who is abused by his or her master. The Quranic-Prophetic tradition was not comprehensive enough to encompass all possible circumstances and new developments. In the living tradition, however, the common sense of the Muslim community extended and enriched the realm of religious laws and regulations in conformity to examples from the Prophetic era in terms of the Quran and Prophetic traditions, legitimizing it through consensus (Fazlur Rahman 1963, 206-7).

A Comparative Appraisal
a. Convergences between the Two Views
1. Avoidance of Both Anti-Traditionalism and Anti-Modernism
Both views agree that the religious tradition is not only a ground of regression, but rather it may pave the path for progress if it is rationally constructed. This is evidenced by a remark by Fazlur Rahman in his *Islam & Modernity*: "we have come to defend that past as though it were our God. Our sensitivities to the various parts or aspects of this past, of course, differ, although almost all of it has become generally sacred to us" (1397a Sh, 186).

This approach is contrasted to the anti-religious intellectualism, which sees the tradition as a factor contributing to regression, believing that it is at odds with modernity, as it is contrasted to the Sunni Salafist discourse or the Shiite School of Separation (*Tafkik*) and Akhbarism, which negate part of the Islamic heritage; that is, philosophy and mysticism.

In addition, both Motahhari and Rahman avoid anti-modernism. In fact, they warmly receive certain achievements of modernity, including the human rights, equality, freedom, human dignity, and their underlying intellectual and social movements. They believe that such developments led to the wellbeing of the human community and should be celebrated and respected (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 19:26).

Both views depart from the anti-modernist discourse in Islam, maintaining that the most strategic challenge facing the Islamic community is to reconcile its tradition with modernity, in order to establish a society that is both faithful to its heritage and able to benefit from modern advances.

2. Religious Rationality and Understanding the Essence of Religion
Both Motahhari and Fazlur Rahman believed that the intellectual stagnation of Islamic society was the main factor contributing to its regression. They argued that this

stagnation prevented Muslims from understanding true Islam as a social philosophy and from distinguishing between social developments and deviations in religion. As a result, Muslim societies lacked creativity and dynamism in their daily lives, as they were overly preoccupied with protecting their religion from what they saw as heretical ideas.

Both Motahhari and Fazlur Rahman believed that rationalism in the social life of Islam is achieved through the practice of ijtihad. They viewed ijtihad as a means of achieving a deeper understanding of the religion, which requires a unique insight in each era. The concept of ijtihad is relative and incremental, which is rooted in two factors: the unlimited potentiality of Islamic sources for investigation, and the natural evolution of human knowledge and thoughts (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 3:202).

In addition to the factors highlighted by Motahhari and Fazlur Rahman, several other factors may have contributed to the intellectual stagnation in Islamic society. For instance, fear of critical thinking, undervaluing intellectual activities, and the prevalence of traditional teachings can all play a role in inhibiting intellectual progress and keeping religious research conservative. Furthermore, the influence of the mindset of laypeople, particularly traditional Muslim merchants who sponsored religious seminaries, may also have contributed to this trend. Because of this, despite the existence of a vibrant philosophical tradition among Shias, which allowed for the free exercise of rationalism and was further developed since the eighteenth century, its impact was limited to the principles of jurisprudence and had little effect on jurisprudence itself. As a result, jurisprudence remained largely traditional and did not expose itself to modern developments.

3. Critical Perspective on the Western Cultural and Social Environment

Motahhari and Fazlur Rahman share a critical view of the cultural and social context of the West, which they see as characterized by cultural and social obscenity, as well as a crisis of identity. They argue that not all changes should be accepted as a transcendence of society, but rather changes that align with human values should be embraced while those that do not should be rejected. Motahhari suggests that there are two types of changes in human life: proper and improper, or transcendental and non-transcendental. He believes that society should harmonize with changes that are directed towards goodness, but reject those that are directed towards badness (1377 Sh, 21:43). Fazlur Rahman says about the cultural repercussions of modernity: "an obsession with purely economic values may result in social deformities and decline that may assume the character of a crucial moral issue-as is the case now with Western nations in general" (1397a Sh, 40).

B. Divergences between the Two Views
1. Different Approaches to Revelation

Muslim revisionist traditionalists, including Motahhari, often adopt a theological and jurisprudential principle known as the traditional approach to revelation (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 21:120). According to this approach, the Quran is considered to be the literal

word of God. This means that all Quranic verses, including doctrinal teachings, moral lessons, jurisprudential rulings, and historical narratives, are believed to be the words of God and therefore are considered transcendental and eternal. This approach is best formulated as follows: in the course of his spiritual journey, the Prophet ascended from the sensory realm to the intellectual realm, attaining the degree of proximity to God and prophethood, where he could intuit all the truths and attain the "Mother Book" (*Umm al-Kitab*), in which the universal truth of the Quran was encapsulated. This truth is a spiritual entity subsisting in a high degree of existence. The Prophet's soul received this truth while he was free from his sensory and imaginative faculties. Subsequently, this truth descends to the imaginal realm, where its image is embodied before the Prophet's soul. The image finally descends to the sensory realm, embodied as uttered and written words (Sadr al-Mutȧallihin 1389 Sh, 365).

Within this perspective, the Prophetic revelation is believed to be characterized by two main aspects: (1) the angel of revelation (Gabriel) serving as the conveyor of the message, and (2) Gabriel teaching the Quranic revelation in a verbal form. The revelation is received through the opening of the Prophet's inner heart to the supernatural realm. The objective reality of the Quran is then taught to the Prophet in this state, and he receives those meanings and conveys them to his audience without any alterations.

In contrast to the traditional view, Fazlur Rahman is critical of the notion that the Quran is the literal word of God. Instead, he suggests that revelation is an experience inspired in the Prophet by God through his spiritual journey. Rahman views this divine experience as having an objective aspect, but also acknowledges that it is affected by varying circumstances, including the Prophet's psychological character and the cultural and historical conditions of the time. As a result, he considers the revelation to be subjective from this aspect. Put simply, according to Rahman, the transcendent experience that the Prophet conveys to his audience is influenced by the Prophet's mindset, historical context, and the audience's culture and language. From a psychological perspective, Rahman suggests that due to God's manifestation to the Prophet's soul, the Prophet has a numinous experience that takes on the form of thoughts and, ultimately, Quranic verses. While revelation has a supernatural origin and can be considered God's word, it is also the Prophet's word in that it is influenced by the Prophet's psychological state and is therefore subjective from this aspect (Fazlur Rahman 1978, 66-72).

As we will see later, this approach to revelation is based on contextualism, which is problematic. Moreover, there is ample textual evidence against this approach, including certain Quranic verses (Q 27:6; 43:3-4; 26:193; 53:4-5; 81:19-20).

2. Contextualism

Another key area of divergence between the two views concerns contextualism with regard to religious propositions. According to this view, the cultural and doctrinal elements of the Prophetic era, which constituted the common sense of the society at that time, are

intertwined with the core of divine teachings. Therefore, an understanding of the religious doctrines requires knowledge of the cultural context in which they were revealed. The reason why religion is influenced by the cultural context of its time is that the Quran and hadiths are linguistic entities and, like any other literary works, they are cultural products that reflect the culture and thoughts of people in a specific era. As such, the Quran is an expression of the beliefs and social values within the Prophet's society and reflects the cultural context of that time. Religious intellectualists, such as Fazlur Rahman, argue that religious texts contain two types of doctrines: essential and accidental. The essential core consists of doctrines that are the ultimate goals of the religion and must be upheld, such as belief in God and the unseen world, and moral values. The accidental components of the religion are rulings and beliefs that were derived from the culture of the Prophet's time and are considered part of historical or contextual Islam.

Since essential and accidental doctrines of the religion are intertwined, religious scholars should revisit the Quran and hadiths in line with the methods of historical criticism. In this way, the components affected by the culture of people at the time of revelation will be sifted through until the essential messages show themselves. Fazlur Rahman argues that certain doctrines of Islam, such as the rulings on slavery, inheritance, and usury, are historical or contextual in nature. These laws were enacted for the sake of justice and to reduce the discrimination arising from the prevalence of slavery, women's lack of social status, and certain unequal economic relations in that society under its specific circumstances.[1] In fact, these laws were not meant to apply to all times. In a society with different social structures, such laws would make no sense, as we see, after the abolishment of slavery and its associated discriminations, the rulings about slavery no longer made sense (Fazlur Rahman 1397a Sh, 28). Therefore, the Quran did not intend these laws as eternal, but as instrumental to actualization of moral and human values commensurate with the temporal conditions of the time. In his *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Fazlur Rahman proposes the theory of the human independence of religion,[2] claiming that the only human need is for the moral core of the religion:

> In view of the fact that man is still plagued by moral confusion, however, and that his moral sense has not kept pace with his advance in knowledge. The seal of prophecy in order to be consistent and meaningful, this argument must add that man's moral maturity is conditional upon his constantly seeking guidance from the Divine Books, especially the Qur'ān. (Fazlur Rahman 1397b Sh, 129)

Regardless of the origins of contextualism,[3] religious intellectualists have offered the following arguments for religious contextualism: (1) revelation is a religious

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1. On this approach, "infallibility" (ʿisma) about the Prophet means that he was immune to errors in choosing the proper laws to arrive at the essential goals of the religion given the cultural and social circumstances of his time.
2. For more about this theory, see Soroush 1375 Sh.
3. For more about the origin of contextualism about religion, see Jafarinejad 1397 Sh, 9.

experience, which is affected by the Prophet's character and his social culture (Soroush 1385 Sh, 13); (2) gradual formation of jurisprudential rulings, which indicates that they reflected the incidents during the Prophet's era. Moreover, sometimes rulings or statements were issued in response to questions asked from the Prophet, such as an inquiry about Dhu l-Qarnayn (Q 18:83-98), rumors spread by hypocrites in Medina (Q 33:60-61), an inquiry about menstruation (Q 2:222), a question about the ruling of drinking wine and gambling (Q 2:219), a question about the inheritance of sisters and brothers (Q 4:176), an inquiry about waging war in forbidden months (Q 2:217), and the like; (3) gradual descent of the Quranic revelation; and (4) the human expectation of the religion, namely the human independence of religion when it comes to social regulations, since such laws can be enacted rationally.

In contrast to religious intellectualists, revisionist traditionalists underscore the trans-historical eternal nature of religious doctrines. The latter believe that religion is not intertwined with the culture of people at the time of its revelation, neither at the stage of its reception nor at the stage of its conveyance. On this account, religion is a set of doctrines that are presented as divine knowledge to the Prophet who received them from the spiritual realm and conveyed them to his audience without any alterations. This set of doctrines is eternal (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 3:178) and is capable of responding to the needs of each era (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 21:306).

As arbitration, let me note that from a religious textual perspective, many Quranic verses imply that the revelation conveyed by the Prophet was the knowledge bestowed upon him by God, without him making any changes in its words or meanings. Examples are verses such as "Indeed you receive the Quran from One who is all-wise, all-knowing" (Q 27:6); "This is indeed [a Book] sent down by the Lord of all the worlds, brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit upon your heart so that you may be one of the warners" (Q 26:192-94). Furthermore, there are hadiths explicitly stating the eternity of the Islamic laws. For instance, in his al-Ghadir sermon, the Prophet said, "every legitimate (halal) thing I guided you to and every illegitimate (haram) thing I prohibited you from, those I do not retract from and I do not change. So, remember them, memorize them, and recommend them to one another, and never change or transform them" (Tabrisi 1380 Sh, 1:83). Another hadith attributed by Imam al-Sadiq to the Prophet says: "Muhammad's halal is halal forever until the day of resurrection and his haram is haram forever until the day of resurrection" (Kulayni 1413 AH, 1:110).

From a non-textual perspective, religious contextualism is subject to the following objection: If the Quran was a product of the Prophet's mystical experience in interaction with the culture of his society, then revelatory teachings would lose all their epistemic validity. This is because, on this view, Quranic propositions would no longer be infallible doctrines revealed by God, but constructs of a fallible mind, which is susceptible to human emotions. In that case, none of the religious rulings would make sense, which amounts to the denial of the authoritativeness of revelatory

teachings and the guiding nature of religion, as guidance makes sense only if the guide has a higher degree of illumination, while contextualism implies the equality of religion and reason.

Above that, religious contextualism does not remain confined to the jurisprudential rulings. Instead, it will extend to all religious propositions, including what is believed to be the core of the religion. Alternatively put, any qualified contextualism ultimately implies absolute contextualism, since there is no plausible ground for restricting it to the jurisprudential domain. In fact, human values and faith may also be susceptible to the culture of the time, which amounts to the denial of any fixed core for the religion.

3. Different Approaches to Ijtihad

Muslim intellectuals believe that the only solution to the conflict of the tradition and modernity is awareness of the essence of religious doctrines, which can be obtained through ijtihad. On this conception, ijtihad is a sort of intellectual struggle to attain the spirit running through the religion at all times as an engine behind the fixed foundations of the religion in keeping with the demands of the era. What matters here is that the different approaches adopted by Motahhari and Fazlur Rahman concerning the theological and jurisprudential principles of religion, such as revelation, historicity of religion, and jurisprudential rulings, imply different functions for ijtihad and its contributions.

Drawing upon the established view, Motahhari defines ijtihad (in jurisprudence) as knowledge of ancillary rulings of Islam through detailed sources and evidence"[1] (1377 Sh, 20:26). On this definition, (1) religious propositions are divided into three categories: ancillary rulings, doctrinal beliefs, and moral values, each of which has its own function; (2) since these doctrines constitute the themes of the religion, which have divine origin, each category is an episode of knowledge, which the Prophet has received from the spiritual realm; (3) these religious doctrines are divine, which means that they are trans-historical, including jurisprudential rulings; (4) among these three categories, the jurisprudential rulings are worldly despite their divine origin, because they outline a plan for life in this world (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 21:120); (5) this plan encompasses regulations and laws that are enacted in accordance with true interests and harms for humans (which serve as criteria of the jurisprudential rulings). This means that the rulings are predicated of universal notions, which are not historical (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 21:295, 299); (6) jurisprudential rulings are comprehensive, since they include rulings about the human-God relationship, the human relationship with him or herself, the human-nature relationship, or the human-human relationship (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 21:301); (7) jurisprudential rulings are enforced at two levels in conformity to the demands of the time: first, under normal circumstances, primary rulings are apply, such as the obligation of fasting or forbidden of destroying a mosque, and second, under emergency circumstances, in which case secondary rulings

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1. This is the well-known definition in standard textbooks of Shiite jurisprudence.

apply, such as the forbiddance of fasting when the person is sick, or when there is a community, there will governmental orders trumping primary jurisprudential rulings (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 21:318) , such as the permissibility of destroying a mosque when there is an exigency in the religious community.[1] Both primary and secondary rulings, which are inferred based on jurisprudential principles, are derived from religious texts, the Quran and hadiths. This provides them with religious textual validity.

According to Motahhari, ijtihad plays a role in reconciling religion with the demands of the modern world through the following mechanism: the religious scholar discovers the criteria of jurisprudential rulings based on his knack of religion, on the one hand, and discerns the fixed essence of the dynamic changeable demands of human life, which consists in innate eternal virtues, such as justice, spirituality, and chastity. In this way, he harmonizes the transcendent essence of the religion (the criteria of the rulings) with the eternal human nature, as the Quran says that religion was sent in conformity to the divine nature of man.

In contrast to the religious intellectualist conception of ijtihad, the traditional notion of ijtihad asserts that human reason alone can never definitely identify the criteria of jurisprudential rulings. At most, it can make speculations, which do not provide solid foundations for religious rulings (Arab Salehi 1393 Sh, 1:44). On the contrary, the criteria of jurisprudential rulings are interests and harms that can only be known through revelation, and hence they should be directly or indirectly derived from religious texts (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 21:312). This is not contradicted by the well-known statement that there is a mutual entailment between jurisprudential and rational rulings. This statement suggests that there is a secret behind every jurisprudential ruling, which would be endorsed by reason if it is discovered for it (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 21:167). As pointed out before, the epistemic core of this approach is that the source of all these secrets is revelation, rather than rational inferences. Motahhari suggests that we should act upon any ruling that is known to be issued by the religion, whether or not we know the secret behind it (1377 Sh, 21:167). This is the formal approach delineated by Muzaffar when he says that criteria of the rulings cannot be known except through the one who has conveyed those rulings; that is, the Prophet (1966, 3:126).

The main advantage of such an approach over ijtihad is that it allows room for finding proper answers to new questions of life, while preserving the theological and jurisprudential principles. That is, modernity can extract answers through the tradition by drawing upon principles such as the principle of *barāa* (exemption or unaccountability) and the rule of mutual entailment between jurisprudential and rational rulings, as well as general jurisprudential laws such as the law of no-harm (*la-darar*) and the law of no-hardship (*la-haraj*), which are based on the Quran and hadiths.

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1. Note that the jurist's verdict about the primary and secondary jurisprudential rulings is called a "fatwa" and his verdict in governmental orders is called a "ruling" (*hukm*).

Contrary to the conventional approach, Fazlur Rahman believes that traditional ijtihad is unable to respond to the problems of the modern world, which is why he proposes a new approach to ijtihad. According to his reading of revelation and his religious contextualism, Fazlur Rahman first divides revelatory doctrines into general trans-historical and particular historical doctrines. On this account, the process of ijtihad involves two transitions: one from the present condition to the time of the Quranic revelation to know the general principles and values of the religion; that is, the criteria of jurisprudential rulings, and to the Quranic approach to those general values by enacting laws and rulings under those specific social circumstances (rather than universal laws). The second transition is to return to the present time to apply those general principles and values to the contemporary historical and social circumstances (Fazlur Rahman 1397a Sh, 12-15). He defines ijtihad as "the effort to understand the meaning of a relevant text or precedent in the past, containing a rule, and to alter that rule by extending or restricting or otherwise modifying it in such a manner that a new situation can be subsumed under it by a new solution" (Fazlur Rahman 1397a Sh, 15).

Put more simply, for Fazlur Rahman, ijtihad is to understand the essence of the religion and its abstraction from its historical embellishments to eventually infer the laws that are congenial to the changing circumstances of life based on the common sense and in line with the essential objectives of the religion. As previously noted, the inferences of commonsensical reason, which are made by legal theorists, politicians, socialists, and economists in each era, count as the historical frameworks fitting the religious ideals as long as they align with the essential doctrines of the religion. In his perspective, the proper religious strategy in each era fits the common sense of that era. This implies that if a procedure was a proper method to attain the human values of the religion in the first Islamic century, for instance, cannot serve as an unchangeable model for the contemporary society (Fazlur Rahman 1965, 240). The criterion for whether a method is religious is the rational inference of contemporary experts based on the common sense at present. Such expert inferences are as valid as the inferences made by the Prophet himself in his own era.

Fazlur Rahman's approach to ijtihad has advantages such as dynamism and the remarkable compatibility of the inferences in question with the moral doctrines of the Quran. However, it is not without its flaws. It is true that whenever reason discovers the criteria of the jurisprudential rulings, it can discover the rulings, but what can serve as a ground for jurisprudential inferences is certitude of those criteria, and not mere speculations. A speculative generalization is an invalid kind of analogy (*qiyās*). As long as we are not certain about the criterion of a ruling, we cannot extend it to other similar cases, but in such textual cases, it is impossible to obtain certitude.

In addition, Fazlur Rahman's model of ijtihad is based on religious contextualism, but as we have seen before, this view is subject to objections. Further, this model of ijtihad has false consequences, which is negation of sanctity about all religious

doctrines, since it provides us with no clear criterion to distinguish different aspects of the religion, to treat some as essential and others as subject to change. It follows that not only the jurisprudential rulings but also the religious doctrines could not have a fixed essence.

Explanation of Why the Two Views Diverge

An explanation is to provide the cause(s) of something in light of a general epistemic law (Gharamaleki 1380 Sh, 185). In this section, I provide a comparative study to offer the epistemic grounds of the divergence of Motahhari's and Fazlur Rahman's views. I argue that there are rival irreconcilable accounts involved here. I believe that the foundation of these two different approaches is constituted by two intellectual components of modernity: relativistic autonomous rationality and historicity.

a. Relativistic Autonomous Rationality

One influential idea involved in the formation of the modernist philosophy is the humanistic approach to understanding. On this approach, the human understanding, rather than religion, is the criterion of all beliefs and values (Kant 1388 Sh, 208).

The humanistic approach does not claim that humans are able to understand everything, but it claims the human understanding of reality is the main measure of knowledge and values, rather revelation or religions. This view was established since Kant (1724-1804). In his view, human autonomous reason is the measure of all values and beliefs, and religion can be accepted only within the boundaries of reason.

It should be noted that a similar approach was adopted by Muslim early Muʿtazilites, as they believed that rational understanding is authoritative about religious doctrines. The difference is that the early Muʿtazilite notion of rationality is rational argument based on self-evident propositions to discover the reality (theoretical reason) and to discover rational goodness and badness, namely the power of reason to identify what is good or bad (practical reason). Muʿtazilites believed that human reason can identify the interests and harms that undergird religious rulings. Inspired by early Muʿtazilites and drawing upon the epistemic foundations of modernity, Muslim intellectualists provided a different account of rationality as relativistic autonomous rationality, which is a foundation of modernity. This is the idea that the only criterion of truth is what human beings understand directly, rather than as mediated by revelation.

According to Fazlur Rahman's conception of the process of ijtihad, we should begin with identifying the implications of Quranic verses given their historical circumstances to glean general criteria and ideals upheld by the Quran. Those criteria should then be extended to the present circumstances. Regarding the relevant capability of reason, he says, "the meaning of a text or precedent, the present situation, and the intervening tradition can be sufficiently objectively known … tradition can be studied with adequate historical objectivity and separated not only from the

present but also from the normative factors that are supposed to have generated it" (Fazlur Rahman 1397a Sh, 15).

Moreover, he believes that the living tradition of the Prophet's companions after his demise when they practiced "ijtihad against the textual evidence" in circumstances different from those of the Prophetic era was a praiseworthy practice (Fazlur Rahman 1963, 206-16). This implies that the criterion for the identification of the essence of religious doctrines is autonomous reason.

In contrast to Fazlur Rahman, Motahhari underlines the limitations of reason when it comes to divine events and the secrets or criteria behind jurisprudential rulings (Motahhari 1377 Sh, 6:881). On this account, a jurist's inference is valid as far as it aligns with revelation and the tradition of the Prophet and Imams, and not as an autonomous source of knowledge.

The humanistic understanding of human beings can be criticized in two aspects. First, it eventuates in skepticism and relativism as it implies that there is no independent criterion for the truth. Instead, it changes with varying circumstances. However, religious intellectualists reject relativism about knowledge, since a statement, in their view, is either true or false; otherwise the law of excluded middle would be contradicted (Soroush 1377 Sh, 118).

It should also be noted that autonomous rationality fulfils only part of human spiritual needs, while contemporary humans need another model of rationality that is mixed with faith. This is the religious rationality that blends worldly rationality with divine faith. If this brand of rationality replaces autonomous rationality, it can resolve the crises of modernity such as identity, moral, and family crises.

Classical and Philosophical Historicism

Classical historicism is the view that human understanding, creed, and culture, rather than their existence or identity, are born of history and the unique cultural and social context of their time. It follows that an author's text can be understood only if we become contemporaneous with the author and know their social orders and circumstances (Edwards 1972, 2:405).

Philosophical historicism, however, is the view that human existence and identity are constructs of history; that is, historical and cultural contexts of a person make their existence (Heidegger 1389 Sh, 489). Humans cannot understand a text regardless of their existential predeterminations.

Fazlur Rahman's approach is inspired by philosophical historicism, as he believes that the Prophet's psychological identity and his revelatory experience are intertwined with his history. On his account, the Quran is God's response to a historical condition through Muhammad's mind (Fazlur Rahman 1397a Sh, 16). Furthermore, his approach to ijtihad is based on classical historicism since, on the one hand, he believes that moral values as the essence of religion are fixed and trans-temporal (1397a Sh,

11) and on the other hand, he believes that it is possible to understand the text (1397a Sh, 15), since understanding the tradition is pivotal to Fazlur Rahman's theory of the consistency of the tradition and modernity. Moreover, as pointed out about his view of ijtihad, he believes that to know the general principles and values of religion as well as the Quranic approach to them, first we should move from the present circumstances to the time of the Quranic revelation, and then glean the general principles of religion by exploring the particular issues addressed in the Quran.

The key idea here is that classical historicism entails philosophical historicism. In fact, historicism in any area implies historicism across the board. This is because when the human understanding is a construct of history, there is no reason to say that their existential identity is not affected by history, and if human existence is a construct of its cultural and historical context, then there will be no fixed criterion for their understanding of the truth. Such understanding will instead be subject to varying circumstances, and this implies relativism and absolute skepticism, which religious intellectualists try to avoid.

Moreover, there is a crucial question before religious intellectualism: Is it possible to remain committed to the intellectual discourse of modernity, without falling into its challenges such as identity and family crises and cultural-social obscenity? Are challenges of modernity inevitable repercussions of humanism, autonomous rationality, and other intellectual components of modernism? In response, religious intellectualists believe that there is no definitive entailment between the intellectual principles of modernity and its cultural and social challenges. In their view, since the ultimate objective of religion is moral and spiritual promotion, the most efficient method to benefit from the achievements of modernity while avoiding its crises is to rely on religion to promote morality and public modesty. For Fazlur Rahman, religion can be a moral and cultural salvation in modern life only if it is construed in modernist terms, as this is the only way to attain the essence of revelatory teachings. The essence of religion can revitalize the dead humanity of the present era, who dedicates all his life to make a means for living (1969).

Revisionist traditionalists believe, however, that since the discourse of modernity is based on relativistic autonomous rationality, it is essentially at odds with religion, since modern reason views religion as something relative both in its belief system and in its rulings and laws. It may be said that the discourse of modernity is free from religion, which is why it suffers from moral crises. As Motahhari says, most miseries of humanity arise from the fact that morality and law have lost their sole warrant, which is religion (1377 Sh, 19|:106).

I believe that since the most pivotal epistemic component of modernity, which constitutes the spirit of modern civilization, is humanism, the association between modernism and the modern social-cultural ambient cannot be ignored, since the

human in humanism is a material human, void of any supernatural dimensions, as the Latin root of "human" (*humus*) means earth (Davies 1386 Sh, 170). Humanism leads to scientism and empiricism, which in turn give rise to atheism and the collapse of moral and social structures. It therefore seems that the moral and cultural challenges of modernism are born out of the modernist thought.

Finally, let me note that while the religious intellectualist approach to the reconciliation of religion and modernity is indeed dynamic and up-to-date, taking account of the integrity and coherence of Quranic doctrines, it obviously contradicts theological principles and explicit religious texts. On the other hand, while the revisionist traditionalist approach is consistent with religious texts, it suffers from some sort of stagnation relative to the fast pace of change in human life.

We may conclude that the most logical way to reconcile religious tradition with the achievements of modernity is to rely on a dynamic jurisprudence that keeps pace with the developments of the world, up-to-date ijtihad, and progressive laws.

Conclusion

The Muslim encounter with astonishing advancements of the Western civilization after the Renaissance posed new questions concerning the relationship and reconciliation between Islam and modernity. Two major approaches were propounded regarding the reconciliation of religion with modernity. Revisionist traditionalists preserved the standard principles of theology and jurisprudence, while providing interpretations of the tradition in line with new circumstances of life, seeking the reconciliation of the modern life and the religious tradition within the tradition itself. In contrast, religious intellectualists criticized the religious tradition in terms of the fundamental principles of modernity to obtain a new reading of religion, which is historical or contextual Islam. On this account, religious doctrines are affected by the culture of time, and jurisprudential rulings are the historical forms of religion, specific to particular circumstances of the past when they fulfilled the main ideals of the religion. In each era, the findings of commonsensical reason in political, social, cultural, and economic dimensions fulfilling the general religious ideals; that is, faith and moral values will be valid, even if they diverge from the orthodox religious laws.

The main problem with religious intellectualism is its explicit contrast to the principles of the religious tradition, and the problem with revisionist traditionalism is its autonomous approach to jurisprudence without making it consistent with the doctrinal and axiological teachings of the religion, as well as its unjustified failure to keep pace with social developments. A solution can be sought in revisiting religious doctrines by providing a consistent account of doctrinal, moral, and jurisprudential aspects of the religion, along with a dynamic jurisprudence.

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