

Islamic political thought in the modern era

Rifaa al-Tahtawi → *The Liberal Trend*

“Economics and politics are to be extensions of ethics”

“Man cannot live alone. He is social by nature and thus in need of others to achieve happiness and well-being. He must therefore live in a society”

“Man is a social animal and needs to cooperation of many individuals in order to support a good life. Thus philosophers have said that man is social by nature. He requires a society which has many inhabitants in order to achieve human happiness. Every man is by necessity in need of others and thus in need to have good relations with others...because they complete him and perfect his humanity. In his turn he perfects their humanity”

“Good rulers are important, but sound leadership is not enough. Society must also be enlisted if the state was to recover its ancient glory”.

“The problem is the lack of al-siyasa al-dhatiyya, the politics of the self that makes man master of his own body. If a man cannot rule his own body, then he cannot serve the maslaha (public good), and his civilization will collapse. Science will wither, politics will stagnate, and the country will fall”

“The “general governing power” is precisely that quality that gives man mastery over himself. It is “an individual’s inspection of his actions, circumstances, words, character, and desires, and his control of them with the reins of his reason... Man is in fact his own doctor. Government and politics are extended here from the affairs of state to the affairs of the self, to matters of personal hygiene, education, and diet. Problems that heretofore had been considered completely unimportant to the business of government now, ranked among its chief concerns. Moreover, the refusal of people to recognize its importance suddenly appeared to be a disturbing retreat into private life, a denial of what was the ultimate public concern”.

“Homeland” and the idea of Patriotism, love for the homeland: there is a close relation between fellow countrymen, there exist certain rights and duties with respect to one another, and what is the most important there is national brotherhood between them, which is higher and more important than religious brotherhood. Each citizen of the country has moral obligations, he should spare no effort for the glory and dignity of his homeland”

N.B: Excerpts are from the *References that are mentioned below*

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani ➡ *The Revolutionary Trend*

“The revival of the Ummah by observing the Islamic revelation and benefiting from Europe’s achievements”

“The obstacles to political reform are the tyrannical rulers served by the masses’ ignorance and colonial European powers helped by the internal divisions among Muslims and the Ummah’s fragmentation”

“The caliphate should be modeled according to the Islamic sources of guidance, especially the Qur’an and Prophet Muhammad’s teachings (Sunnah), and that the Ummah’s (the world Muslim community) unity is one of Islam’s political pillars”

“The education of the masses about the corrupt ruling regime by comparing it to the Islamic and modern standards of government as reflected in the Islamic sources (basically the Qur’an and the Sunnah) and western democracies”.

“The mobilization of the masses and the organization of the followers to overthrow authoritarianism and establish a modern Islamic regime”

“It is not the religious beliefs, whether right or wrong, which are opposed to culture and material progress, but that belief which prohibits learning of sciences, earning one’s livelihood and the ways of culture. I do not believe that there is any religion in the world which opposes these things. I would rather say that it is non-believing which inevitably leads to disorder and distortion of culture as in the case of the Nihilists”.

N.B: *Excerpts are from the References that are mentioned below*

Muhammad Abdu  *the reformist trend*

“The greatest single cause of decline in these communities was despair; people were unable to see any prospect of improvement in their institutions, and they tended to see the disease of society as incurable and to believe that each following day would be worse than the previous day. This state of mind is the result of ignorance of the teachings of the Qur'an and the hadith (prophetic traditions), coupled with reliance on unauthentic hadith, or on misinterpretation of correct hadith. The Qur'an calls this frame of mind false and faithless”

“Islam is compatible with the demands of time and circumstances”

“Liberation of the thought from the shackles of taqlid and understand religion as it was understood by the elders of the community before dissension appeared; to return, in the acquisition of religious knowledge, to its first sources, and to weigh the mon the scales of human reason, which Allah has created in order to prevent excess or adulteration in religion, so that Allah's wisdom may be fulfilled and the order of the human world preserved”

“Religion must be accounted a friend to science, pushing man to investigate the secrets of existence, summoning him to respect established truths, and to depend on them in his moral life and conduct”

“Muslims could selectively appropriate aspects of Western civilization that were not contrary to Islam. The Muslims could adopt the institutions, social customs, methods of education and ways of thought of modern Europe; but they should justify the changes in terms of principles set forth in Islam”.

“The doctrine of 'Abdu emphasized equally two elements: the need to hold fast to what was unchanging in Islam and the need to change what might be changed. He believed that the religion of Islam consists of two major parts. The first part embraces clearly stated laws that every Muslim must know and abide by. These laws are clearly stated in the Qur'an and are explained in detail in the sunnah (traditions) of the Prophet and have been transmitted by the Muslims through practice. These are indisputable, and there is no place for ijtiḥad regarding them. The second part consists of rules not derived from clear-cut texts nor ijma' (consensus of majority of the Muslims); and for this part, the ijtiḥad is permitted.

There was a distinction between what was essential and unchanging in it and what was inessential and could be changed without damage.

The basis for his reformist thought was his belief that reason and revelation were complementary, and that there was no inherent contradiction between religion and science. Reason and science were the twin sources of Islam. They neither possess separate spheres nor conflict with each other in the same sphere. Therefore, the mark of the ideal Muslim society is not only law, but also reason”.

N.B: Excerpts are from the References that are mentioned below

Muhammad Rashid Reda



the reformist trend

“The conservation of Muslim identity and culture. Original Islamic sources—the Quran, Sunnah, and ijma of prophet’s companions—are the essences for reform”

“Matters of worship (ibadat), intended to organize human behavior, were revealed in the Quran and authentic hadith, making them inalterable. Human affairs (muamalat), in case of inexistence of a certain, authentic, and binding text, can be reformed according to the interest of the Muslim society (maslahah). Ijtihad is to be executed to achieve the public benefit”.

“The Holy Quran has been the safeguard, throughout history, of every efflorescence of Islamic renewal and progress that led to strong and civilized societies, sovereign states and a high status in the world. Consequently, the Holy Quran is the hope now for regaining what we have lost in terms of civilization, sovereignty and prosperity. After discussing the effect of the Holy Quran through the history of Islamic civilization.

The belief that Muslims have not weakened and became deprived of their reign except after leaving the guidance of the Quran. They will not regain what they have lost in terms of sovereignty, pride and respect except by returning to its guidance.

“The return to the Holy Quran to seek inspiration from its meanings and employ it to achieve the reawakening of the Ummah. This will be realized by reforming the Ummah’s conditions so as to regain its ability to effectively act in a manner that benefits its religion, civilization and message in this world”

N.B: *Excerpts are from the References that are mentioned below*



“Reform (iṣlāḥ) is a multi-dimensional phenomenon: political, social, religious, and moral”

“Islam repudiated any kind of despotism and offered the people a pathway to live under liberty and freedom. It was not the religion that was to be blamed but its appropriation by religious and political despots. Islam provided the foundations of a political and social order that combined “the best of democracy and aristocracy.” But that order proved short-lived and was followed by a corrupted Islam and a degenerate Umma. Islam and the Qur’an in particular, had advanced a comprehensive chain of legal thought that constituted the basis for justice and fairness for all people and for any time and place. Its precepts amounted to an unambiguous affirmation of freedom and the removal of tyranny and arbitrariness. Its fundamental principle, which had been subverted by religious authorities through shirk and the attendant unreflecting obedience by the masses to temporal power, was tawḥīd, the simple belief that “There is no god other than God.” Tawḥīd stood for an end to subservience and servitude”.

True Islam, as embodied in the Qur’an, is based on reason, and any genuine revival of Islam would require a revival of ijtihād. His emphasis on ijtihād is of a piece with his general espousal of freedom and his resolute opposition to curtailment of freedom by the state.

“political despotism as an “attribute of the absolute government that conducts the affairs of its subjects willfully and arbitrarily, with no fear of accountability or punishment”

“Even an elected and constitutional government can be despotic if it is not restrained by checks and balances and mechanisms of accountability”.

“The despotic state not only denies people the right to be free and to live in dignity; it also strives to keep them ignorant. The worst kind of tyranny is the tyranny of ignorance. Tyrants emasculate essential knowledge, especially forms of knowledge that would contribute to the development and progress of society. They do not fear philology and other fields of learning that do not immediately threaten their power. Nor do they fear the otherworldly dimensions of religion; on the contrary, they welcome otherworldly resignation as it serves to distract the people and thereby strengthen their power. But, he adds, they “writhe with fear of crucial knowledge” such as theoretical speculation, rationalist philosophy, civil rights, law, politics, history, and ethics, for these fields of knowledge “uplift the spirit, broaden the mind, and teach people the idea that they have rights, the extent to which they are deprived of those rights, and how they should demand, attain, and preserve them”.

“Without the ability to act on free will, progress is impossible and decline is inevitable”

“The progress of the West owes much to “the adoption of logical and well-practiced rules that have become social duties in these advanced nations and which are not harmed by what appears to be a division into parties and groups, because such a division is only over the methods of applying the rules and not over the rules themselves”

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