

IRFAN ABDUL HAMEED FATTAH'S CONTRIBUTION  
TO ISLAMIC THOUGHT: WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON  
HIS BOOK *AL-FIKR AL-DINI FI MUWAJAHATI  
TAHADIYYAT AL-HADATHAT*

BY

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Introduction:

- Prof Irfan did not study modernity from historical perspective, rather he specifically focus on the impact of modernity on religion.
- Three main qualitative characteristics of modernity:
  - i) Man is the measure of all things
  - ii) Reason is the measure of all things
  - iii) Science is the measure of all things

• Philosophical trends of modernity:

a) Scientism

- scientific methods and instruments alone are capable of providing an accurate truth and reality.
- regards science as the only reliable source of knowledge.

b) Positivism

- holds that the only authentic knowledge is the knowledge based on the testimony of observation and experience, interpreted through reason and logic.

c) European Enlightenment

- the supremacy of human reason as a means to establish knowledge.
- Anything which cannot be understood by rational knowledge was regarded as meaningless and superstitious.

d) Extreme subjectivism and excessive individualism

- knowledge is merely subjective and there is no *absolute truth or reality*, having *only relative, subjective value* according to differences in perception and consideration.

e) The implementation of the theory of evolution in the study of human sciences in general, and the study of religion in particular.

f) The perception toward religion

- Religion is the product of socio-historical situation
- Religion is a reflection of different social setting and historical perspectives
- Religion is entirely unscientific worldview

g) The method of the study of scriptures is mainly concerned with the historical and human interpretations of scriptures.

- This method was known as socio-historical textual criticism.

Three Categories of Religious Responses to Modernity:

i) A Forthright absolute rejection of modernity

- In Islamic group, it is represented by the anti-westernization or west-intoxication groups or those generally known as blind imitationists or ultra-traditionists.
- In Judaism, it is called Jewish Orthodoxy or Orthodox Judaism.
- In Christianity, it is referred to Catholicism and Evangelical fundamentalism.

ii) An unconditional, absolute and comprehensive assimilation of modernity.

-In Islamic group, it is associated with the extreme Muslim secularists with the attitude of the assimilationists or the advocates of full-westernization without any reservation.

-In Judaism, it is referred to Jewish Reformism. This group rejected all prescriptions enjoined in both written and oral Torah, considering them as irrelevant to modern times and wholly anachronistic, medieval, and outdated, hence must be reinterpreted and modified in accordance with the spirit of the time.

-In Christianity, this group is associated with Christian liberalism. It reinterprets the traditional dogma from a historical evolutionary perspectives.

iii) A syncretic or a symbiosis amalgamation

-In Islamic group, it is associated with Muslim revivalist who attempted to establish continuity between their Islamic heritage and modern change. On the one hand, they based their principle arguments on the Revelation and Islamic history, and identified themselves with their pre-modern Islamic revivalist predecessors. On the other hand, they applied selective values of modern Western thought and institutions. Therefore, not simply restoring the early Islamic practices, Muslim revivalists advocated an adaption of Islam to modernity, and so, possessed an outlook toward both the past and the future.

-In Judaism, this group is represented by Conservative Judaism which allowed changes, reinterpretations, and modifications in its religious forms or laws.

-In Christianity, it is advocated by a group of theologians known as Christian neo-orthodoxy who confirmed the reconcilability or compatibility of faith and reason. It argued that to meet the challenges of the modern world, the key concepts and faith have to be redefined and reinterpreted.

Conclusion

- Prof Irfan referred to many views of modern Western thinkers and philosophers to show their weakness, defaults and their contradiction with the principles of Islam, and at the same time, as a means of proving the validity of Islam.

- \* Therefore, Prof Irfan did not reduce his approach in defense of Islam to only a one dimensional method, namely, Islamic traditional thought, but he felt that the challenges of modernity needed to be answered intellectually from the modern scientific and philosophical thought.

- \* Since Prof Irfan had knowledge of both modern Western philosophy and Islamic religious tradition, he had a tendency to differentiate between the positive and negative facets in each.

- \* The most important aspect of Prof Irfan's mind was his critical approach towards both cultures.