

## Ulasan Buku/Book Review

*Islam and Modernism*. By M. Taqi Usmani. 2002. Translated by Mohammed Swaleh Siddiqui. Revised and edited by Mohammad Wali Raazi. New Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 139pp, ISBN: 81-7435-197-3 and Price: Rs.90.00. Reviewed by Ibrahim Abu Bakar.

This book is originally written in Urdu by Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani. It seems that he has been a very productive and prolific writer since he has written many articles in Urdu “for the last twenty seven years” and many of those articles are published in the monthly journal called *Al-Balagh*. A collection of his articles comprising about 750 pages was “published in Urdu seventeen years ago under the caption ‘Asr-e-Hazir Mein Islam Kaiysay Nafiz H’ (How to Implement Islam in the present time)...”(p.5)

The title of this book in Urdu is “Islam aur Jiddat Pasandi” before it was two years later translated into English with the title *Islam and Modernism*.(p. 6). The book is forwarded by the author himself. At the end of his “Foreword”, the author hopes that Allah makes his book “beneficial for the Muslims and may be a source of Allah’s reward in the Hereafter.”(p.6)

This book has eleven chapters and each of them has different chapter title. Chapter one is on “Islam and modernity” (pp.7-21). According to the author, Islam does not oppose modernity and modernism since man has a natural urge to seek modernity and Islam is a natural religion. Man has an inherent modernist trait namely “he is a ‘modernist’ and avaricious of ‘better to best’ achievements.” Modernity and modernism in their simple senses of the words refer to “the use of latest and newer methods in industry and craft and war technologies”(p. 7). The author cites that the Prophet Muhammad accepted and used the modern and new method suggested by Salman Farsi to defend and protect Madinah from the raids and attacks by the enemies of Islam and Muslims. The defense method suggested by Salman Farsi was not known and used by the Arabs. He suggested digging a trench around the city of Madinah. This suggestion was hailed by the Prophet Muhammad and he himself took part in digging the trench, and the Muslims in Madinah were able to defeat their enemies.(pp.7-8). The other examples from the era of the Prophet Muhammad are his advices and encouragements for “the people of Madinah to promote agriculture by increased cultivation and use of

camel skulls in their fields for increased production” and to increase in clothes trading and to go to Omman and Egypt for trade.(pp.8-9). The author cites few examples from the Prophetic era with the purpose of proving that “Islam has not objected to any modern advancement just because it is recent and modern. Rather it has encouraged modernity for rightful purposes and within rightful limits.”(p. 10). Modernity brings good and useful advancements for human beings. However, the author demands that Muslims should fonder or reflect and decide on “which invention is useful and acceptable and which is harmful and not acceptable.”(p. 11). Their reflections and decisions must be based on the Divine Revelations and the sound intellectuals. The author acknowledges that “the field of activity with regard to modernism as provided by Islam is very vast in which one can live a modern life without deviating from the way of Allah in the least. In them the man may apply his intellectual abilities and may achieve enormous heights of knowledge and discoveries as well as Science and Technology, and make them more and more useful for mankind.”(p. 21).

Chapter two is on “Islam and industrial revolution” (pp. 23-30). This chapter points out two types of changes taken place as the result of the European industrial revolution. They are the good and evil changes. The good changes are useful “for Science and Technology to have attained the present standard” as well as for human well being.. The evil changes after the industrial revolution are “nudity, free mixing of man and woman, music and dances, interest and birth control”.(p. 25). The author wants Muslim modernists to select and choose the good changes taken place after the industrial revolution in Europe, and asks them not to propagate the evil changes taken place after the industrial revolution such as the hedonism and materialism and other Western ideologies. The author concludes the second chapter with his wish for Muslim modernists that they “think over these submissions seriously and realistically and their able efforts are spent on some constructive service instead of distorting or innovating the Islamic guidance.”(p. 30).

Chapter three is on “the demands of time”(pp.31-47). He begins this chapter with the statement, “Religious scholars (Ulema) should behave according to the demands of time”.(p. 31). This catchword is repeated by many Muslim leaders and Muslim modernists because they assume that “religious scholars are the biggest obstacle in the way of progress and hence no heed should be paid to them and to what they say.”(p. 31). In this chapter, the author states that “the modernists of Islam want to make similar amendments by considering Islam equal to

Christianity and scholars of Islam parallel to popes and to themselves they regard Luthers and Rusos of the time. In this way they want to become the Reformers of Muslim nation by opposing and defaming the religious scholars.”(p. 44).

“Research or Distortion” is the chapter title for the fourth chapter (pp. 49-60). Originally it was directed to Dr. Fazlur Rahman who headed Institute of Islamic Research in Pakistan(p.49). This author considers F. Rahman as a Muslim modernist and he disagrees with his modernist ideas and thoughts. For this author, what had been presented by Rahman was not a research but a distortion from the true teachings of Islam. This author claims that Rahman and other Muslim modernists have founded their Islamic modernism on the two wrong and misleading hypotheses. First, “they pre-supposed that the thirteen hundred years old laws of Islam have now become worne out and outdated, and it is not possible to implement and comply with them unless some fundamental changes are made in them”. Second, they have in their minds that “ideological and practical expositions of Western civilization are all blessings and benedictions, and unless Muslims accept them in toto their survival in the present time is impossible.”(p. 52). This author continues his attacks on Rahman and other Muslim modernists in chapter five with the title “New Interpretation of Islam”(pp. 61-71).

With the chapter title “Scholars of Islam and Papacy” (pp.73-84), the author stresses the differences between the scholars of Islam and papacy. His aim is to reject the Muslim modernist understanding of no Brahmanism and papacy in Islam.

Chapter seven, eight and nine present Islamic teachings related to science and technology namely “Science and Islam” (pp. 85-89) in chapter seven, and “the conqueror of space “(pp. 91-103) in chapter eight, as well as “Islam and conquer of the universe”(pp.105-111). The author emphasizes that Islam indeed encourages Muslims to explore the universe and advance in science and technology that are both useful and not harmful to human beings.

The chapter ten focuses on “Ijtehad”(pp. 113-122) that recounts the speech delivered by the Editor of *Al-Balagh* in the 1404 A.H. convention of the Ulema (Religious scholars) in Islamabad, Pakistan during the reign of General Ziaul Haq. The speech was “How to start the process of Ijtehad in the country”(p. 113). It is stressed that “‘Ijtehad’ is like a double-edge sword. If it is properly understood, and used within its limitations of fulfilling the conditions laid down for it, this can be a source of great treasure of Islamic laws, and a matter of

great pride for the nation. But if it is allowed to be wrongly used by incapable persons it will result in creating false concepts and irreligious movements...”(pp.114-115).

The last chapter focuses on “Aggressive and defensive jihad”(pp.123-139). It reproduces the answer given by the author to the reader of the journal *Al-Balagh* (March 1971). The reader wants the author Muhammad Taqi Usmani to explain the differences between the aggressive *jihad* and the defensive *jihad* in dealing with non-Muslims.(p. 123).

The book many chapters are evidently aimed at discrediting and criticizing Muslim modernists and especially Dr. Fazlur Rahman who was the director of Institute of Islamic Research in Pakistan . It is probably true to state here that this book is a rejection and refutation to whatever reformist and modernist idea and concept as advocated by F. Rahman.

Indeed it is very strange and unreasonable for this author to equate Muslim modernists such as F. Rahman with “the names of Musailamah, Abdullah bin Saba, Abu Musa Mazdar, Hasan bin Sabbah, Qaramat, Abul Fazl, Faizi and Kamal Ata-Turk.”(p.46). Muslim modernists such as F. Rahman in Muslim history of ideas and thoughts never agree with the beliefs and ideologies advocated by Musailamah, Abdullah bin Saba and other names mentioned by this author in his book.

The author also equates “the opponents of modernism in Islam” with “Abu Bakr Sidiq (RA), Ali bin Abi Talib (RA), Ahmad bin Hanbal (RhA), Mahmud Ghaznawi (RhA) and Mujaddid Alf Thani (RhA)”.(p. 46) to show his admiration, agreement or support for the Muslims who have opposed Muslim modernists like Dr. Fazlur Rahman in Pakistan. It was probably due to the Muslim opponents who strongly rejected and blamed him in Pakistan, Rahman was unable to remain in Pakistan and he left for the United States to become a professor at universities there. This author was clearly among the great opponents of Rahman

The author does not define modernity and modernism. He just writes, “Search for ‘Modernity’ by itself is a commendable desire and a natural urge of humankind. If this urge was not there, man would not have reached from stone-age to atomic era,....”(p. 7). Regarding Islam and modernism, the author states, “Hence Islam, being a natural religion, is not opposed to modernism as far as it implies to be modern in simple sense of the word.”(p. 7). He does not elaborate on the meanings and aims of modernism as advocated by Muslim modernists

but he blames them for their modernism. Moreover, the academic works list their references at the ends of the works but this book does not list its references. It has gone out of the academic norm and standard work. Hence its readers are unable to see and check the validity and accuracy of what has been said by the author in this book. The book contains some verses from the Koran; it seems that these verses of the Koran are cited to prove the author's understandings, interpretations and the arguments in stating his own stances or in rejecting the stances taken by Muslim modernists and other Muslim blocs.

Prof. Madya Dr. Ibrahim Abu Bakar  
Jabatan Usuluddin dan Falsafah  
Fakulti Pengajian Islam  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
43600 UKM, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.  
abi@ukm.my

