# Contemporary Islamic Revivalism: Key Perspectives

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**Abstract**

In the last three decades Islam has reemerged as an important global phenomenon and is aptly referred to as a contemporary Islamic revivalism. As a phenomenon, contemporary Islamic revivalism is an attempt by a small but important section of the Ummah (community of believers) to reestablish Islam as the principal paradigm for personal as well as public life across the globe.

Its hallmark is a return to Islamic origins, the fundamentals of the authentic faith embodied in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, the sayings and practices of the Prophet Muḥammad (ṢAAS).

This article is an exploration of the explanations of a contemporary Islamic revivalism. Contemporary Islamic revivalism can be explained in many different ways, however, this paper focuses on the *crisis perspective*, the *success perspective*, and the *crisis of modernity perspective* to arrive at a more analytical understanding of this important sociological phenomenon.

## Introduction

Islamic revivalism is a sociologically significant phenomenon in the contemporary period. Constituted by a large diversity of revivalist movements, Islamic revivalism is a complex and heterogeneous reality.

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As R. Hrair Dekmejian observes, the movement to return to a pristine Islam or the development of Islamic revivalism "is at once spiritual, social, economic, and political in nature."[1] Though it is by no means a monolithic phenomenon, a common thread between these disparate movements binds them together. This thread is the ideology of a defensive reaction to the crisis of modernity.

There is more than one explanation or one set of explanations for the emergence of the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism. To maintain a simple approach to the explanations of Islamic revivalism in this paper, attention will be focused on just three key perspectives: the socioeconomic and political perspective,[2] or what Dekmejian[3] prefers to collectively call a "crisis perspective"; the historical-cultural perspective,[4] or what Daniel Pipes[5] describes as a "success perspective"; and the "defensive reaction to modernity perspective"[6] or what I would like to call the "crisis of modernity perspective." In the crisis perspective, Islamic revivalism is the result of poverty and discontent or crisis in society.[7] From the success perspective, historically there is a positive relationship between success of Islamic societies and government – for example, economic development, territorial expansion, Muslim population growth, and cultural richness all due to the right observance of Islamic teachings leading to Muslim success.[8]

From the crisis of modernity perspective, contemporary Islamic revivalism is discerned as a defensive reaction to modernity – and more accurately so, as a response to the failure or consequences of modernity. The key contentions of this framework are that by Muslims subjecting Islam to a process of "de-traditionalization,"[9] a more purified Islam is created which then forms the basis for the creation of the caliphate (the kind of ruling headship over the congregation of Islam established after the death of the Prophet). In this respect, Islamic revivalism means purification from foreign accretions and the securing of a political authority in an attempt to form an Ummah (Muslim community), thus maintaining a clear distinction between the *dār al-Islām* ( the abode of Islam) and *dār al-ḥarb* (the abode of war).

Among these explanations for Islamic revivalism there is one common theme present – that the world today is a place of great disenchantment and is in crisis as a result of both the real and perceived failure of "the 'modernity project." In this disenchanted and crisis-ridden world, Muslims find their societies in crisis (in the areas of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination, inequality, injustice, oppression, corruption, stagnation, underdevelopment, and homelessness), and are reverting to Islam with the intention of creating an "enchanted" *dār al-Islām*. However, there are some Muslims who have attributed some sociopolitical suc-

cesses – such as the initial victories by Egypt and Syria in the Arab-Israeli war in 1973 and the oil-related increase of the Arab-Muslim influence – to having strengthened their hopes for a better life and engendered a strong faith in Islam. This has significantly contributed to Islamic revivalism.

In this article, I examine statements of those involved in Islamic revivalism to understand the key features of contemporary Islamic revivalism – particularly in terms of their main concepts, objectives, and ideologies. Furthermore, I explore why Islam as a religious tradition reemerged in an epoch characterized by modernity. The principal aim of this paper is to locate Islamic revivalism in modernity and identify it as a significant sociological phenomenon worth a rigorous investigation and analysis.

## Islam and the Colonial Experience

In order to better understand the emergence of Islamic revivalism and gain a clearer insight into the phenomenon itself, a brief look at the colonial experience of the people of *dār al-Islām* in the last 150 years is essential. The encounter of the West with the people of *dār al-Islām* brought about the decline of the Muslim world[10] – and then the subsequent reassertion of Islamic fundamentalism.

Thus, in the last 150 years or so, revivalist ideas and motivations have surfaced essentially in direct response to the challenges and experiences generated by Western influence and intrusion, particularly European expansion in Islamic life. European conquests of Muslim territories, which began in the sixteenth century, overwhelmed Muslim societies with new Western technologies, methods of economic management, political systems, and ideology.[11] By the nineteenth century, Muslim rulers, who had reigned supreme for many centuries, fell decisively under Western domination, and their societies were confronted with a multiplicity of challenges.[12] The advent of colonialism broke up the established Islamic political order – particularly that of the Mughal Islamic dynasties and the Ottoman Empire, both of which remained intact for centuries – and contested traditional beliefs and norms, thus causing a major crisis of Islamic authority and of Muslim identity.[13] Under Western influence and colonial rule, modernity found its way into *dār al-Islām*, bringing sweeping changes in the Muslim world.[14] The processes of secularization, urbanization, modernization, materialization, and Westernization undermined and challenged old myths, doctrines, institutions, social structures, and social relationships. As a result, Muslims and Muslim societies underwent radical socioeconomic, cultural, and political reshuffles, changes, and reconstructions.[15]

To counter the domination of European colonial powers and secure its survival, the Islamic religion took on a political dimension in the twentieth century in *dār al-Islām*, inspiring anti-colonial and nationalist movements. Notable Muslim figures like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897) of Iran, Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) of India, and Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) of Egypt emerged to meet the modern challenges and embarked on a quest of forging what they understood as a truly Islamic identity and of establishing an Islamically-oriented order. They asked, why were Muslims who were once innovative, perspicacious, progressive, and intellectually farsighted, suddenly became incompetent and imitative – and to what extent had this lack of competitiveness contributed to their failures in the modern world? They realized that by now many Islamic disciplines – such as law, theology, and philosophy – were in decline. They acknowledged that the creative period of Islamic Golden Age had long passed and accepted the fact that many Islamic disciplines had declined significantly or were at least in a state of stagnation. Muslim scholars, they claimed, opted for imitation by following what scholars of the Islamic Golden Age had left and new intellectual contributions were limited. Why, they asked, did Muslims fail to adopt the initiatives that have been pursued by the West in developing its societies? Consequently, old ideas were redefined or polished and new concepts proposed. In their attempts to modernize Islam, and subsequently restore independence to Muslim societies, these thinkers encouraged the implementation of concepts, alien to Islamic heritage – such as nationalism, secularism, urbanism, capitalist materialism, and Marxist social radicalism.

Collectively, these Muslims were described as a movement for Islamic modernism which called for *iṣlāh* (external reform), taking a stance against those who advocated *taḳlīd* (imitation) of the prophetic time.[16] They argued that the best in European philosophy and science could be accommodated by Islam.[17] Islam, they contended, was both *dīn wa-dunyā* (religion and the world). They argued that the separation of *dīn* (religion) and *dunyā* (world) – particularly in the context of Sufi mystic teachings, which give priority to the spiritual over the material dimensions of life – was a contributing factor toward the underdevelopment of Muslim societies. They saw an urgent need for Muslim societies to become competitive in the modern world and accommodate social change. Muslims, these reformers suggested, must develop systems that are suitable to their historical and social milieu. They argued that the changes brought about under European colonialism have caused crisis in Muslim societies and, therefore, a fresh interpretation of Islam was warranted.

This accommodationist outlook saw many Muslim states adopt the political, economic, and educational institutions of the Western states

that had colonized them. They embraced Western discourses of nationalism, institutional models of parliamentary government, and economic and educational systems in order to achieve independence from the West. However, as John Esposito explains "Neither liberal nationalism nor the radical Arab nationalism/socialism of Gamal Abdel Nasser or the Baath party had succeeded. Problems of authoritarianism, legitimacy, and political participation continued to plague most Muslim countries. . . ."[18]

Similarly, Shireen Hunter[19] notes that despite the majority of Muslim states embracing modernization and national development after independence, in general social and economic conditions did not improve for ordinary Muslims. Many continued to experience poverty, social inequality, and injustice. Living standards for most ordinary Muslims barely changed. Hunter[20] argues that this was the result of incomplete modernization, either because post-colonial Muslim states remained politically dependent or the benefits of modernization were monopolized by traditional elites. As a general mood of decline and stagnation continued, the vast majority of Muslims finally realized that "the paradigm of modernization and the political elites associated with it have failed to avert the Islamic world's decline and end its state of political and economic dependency."[21] Hunter also suggests that because of the specific nature of the process of modernization, and the imposing way in which it was applied, modernization proved counterproductive and generated a widespread sense of despair and malaise. Instead of taking equal care of new cultural, social, and political attitudes, and developing new and broad-based institutions with the ability to cater for the requirements of modernity, the focus of these post-colonial Islamic states centered exclusively on material modernization. By uprooting old social and political institutions and patterns of relationships – whether based on tradition or religion – material modernity created a void. The newly created social and political forces and other new demands did not properly cater for or offer appropriate channels of expression. "The result for the majority of people has been a growing feeling of psychological, social, and political alienation and disorientation."[22] According to Abdel Salam Sidahmed and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, the development of contemporary Islamic revivalism as a significant political phenomenon, grows out of the experience of decolonization and continued underdevelopment in much of the Muslim world.[23] Islamic revivalism emerged in response to the perceived failure of secular models of development, on the one hand – and a strong antagonism toward the religion of Islam and its adherents, on the other. Social displacement – emerging from or following economic advancement, sudden urbanization, rapid modernization, educational progress and innovation, and social development – had created growing social conflicts and

disharmony. "This environment was compounded by the growing inability of the states to provide necessary services for their subjects as a result of mounting economic crises."[24] Importantly, modernization as a process has generally occurred in an unbalanced fashion and the impact of economic and social development made possible by modernization was felt in a disproportionate way by the population. "In addition, many Islamic leaders have used the paradigm of modernization to justify and legitimate their arbitrary rule."[25] Muslims felt a strong sense of being socially, economically, and politically eclipsed and deprived of the benefits of modernization.

Contemporary Islamic revivalism, therefore, is a struggle against the forces hostile to religion and the aspects of traditional and religious life. The Islamic revivalists, who subscribe to this ideological approach, see Islamic revivalism as the last hope for bringing about Islamically prudent and acceptable changes in their societies. For these revivalists, the recovery of a pristine Islam is the solution to current existing problems. Through personal and social reform and Muslim unity, they seek to strengthen Islam from within and present it as the alternative to Western order. They see in an Islamic revolution a real potential for the implementation of God's will in the world that they have been commanded to undertake in their scripture – leading to positive changes in Muslim societies and consequently world peace and harmony. Muslims, as believers in the unity of God, see themselves as the chosen people bestowed with the responsibility to form the Ummah, guided by the Sharī'ah (Islamic law), and to be an example for other people to emulate.

## The Definition of Islamic Revivalism and Explanations for the Emergence of Contemporary Islamic Revivalism

Before proceeding to a more detailed discussion of the various perspectives that seek to explain the emergence of contemporary Islamic revivalism, it would be helpful to look briefly at the key defining issues surrounding contemporary Islamic revivalism and examine the principal concepts surrounding it.

As a concept and a phenomenon, contemporary Islamic revivalism is variously referred to as:

- activism,
- awakening,
- fundamentalism,

- neo-fundamentalism,
- integrism,
- Islamism,
- Khomeinism,
- messianism,
- militancy,
- millenarianism,
- puritanism,
- reassertion,
- reawakening,
- rebirth,
- reconstruction,
- reemergence,
- reform,
- regeneration,
- renaissance,
- renewal,
- return to Islam,
- resurgence,
- resurrection,
- revitalization,
- revival,
- revivification,
- revolution,
- traditionalism, and
- upsurge.[26]

Collectively these concepts describe the complex and diverse nature of the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism, revealing that it is not a monolithic and unified phenomenon but rather a heterogeneous reality. As suggested by Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism is "not a monolithic phenomenon but, rather, socially and historically conditioned."[27]

In general scholarly literature and in journalistic writing, these concepts are used interchangeably, rendering the terminology obscure and even problematic.[28] Such a multiplicity of usages hardly helps clarify the phenomenon. Furthermore, it is worth noting that within the Arabic language, Islamic revivalism finds many expressions. Islamic revivalists in their writings have adopted expressions such as *al-ba'th al- Islāmi* (Islamic renaissance), *al-shwa al-Islāmiah* (Islamic awakening), *ihyah ad-dīn* (religious revival), *al-taya'r al-Islāmi* (Islamic current), *al-itijah al-Islāmi* (Islamic tendency), and *al-usuliyah al- Islāmiah* (Islamic fundamentalism).[29] Suffice to say all these concepts and terms in some direct or indirect way delineate the phenomenon under investigation, but it remains difficult to find a common or universal definition of it. Dessouki, however, provides a sociologically plausible pointer when he argues that the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism "refers to the increasing prominence and politicization of Islamic ideologies and symbols in Muslim societies and in the public life of Muslim individuals."[30] Daniel Pipes comes nearer to a satisfactory general definition when he asserted that the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism "is understood to mean an increase in Islamic activism" which is concerned with "working for the goals of the shari'a, the sacred law of Islam."[31]

Given the problem of assigning a universal definition to this multidimensional and multifaceted phenomenon, I draw on various attempts to specify the character of contemporary Islamic revivalism, and concepts associated with it, so as to provide as clear a working definition as possible: a process of purifying Islam from accretions and promoting its activism in a pristine form both in the public and private affairs of Muslim individuals as a worldview and world order.

## Theoretical Underdevelopment

In recent years, there has been a wide-ranging collection of written material produced on Islamic revivalism, in academic journals[32] in edited books,[33] and also in monographs.[34] Despite these, further study of Islamic revivalist movements is necessary, particularly research based on empirical investigations.[35] Although there has been a surge of written material on revivalist movements in recent years,[36] religious sociology more broadly[37] and the sociology of Islam in particular have a long way to go because there is a significant lack of detailed research into particular aspects of both religious revivalism and Islamic revivalist movements. This in turn precludes the establishment of a theory to sufficiently explicate this phenomenon.

The written material on contemporary Islamic revivalism needs to address the absence of sociological theory. In the context of Christianity, for instance, a Church-Sect theory exists and it is widely utilized to explain the emergence of sects as social or religious movements. This theory can be used in the context of other world religions including Islam, for as Mark Sedgwick argues, "religious bodies in the Islamic world do follow this basic [sect-type/ church-type] distinction, as in the West."[38] In relation to Islam, however, despite a few attempts,[39] the field of contemporary Islamic revivalism remains un-theorized or under-theorized. As Salem remarks:

> There exists a need to find new approaches to the study of the relationship between religion and politics, in general, and between Islam and Middle Eastern politics, in particular . . . social scientists are ill equipped. . . . An intellectual block seems to hinder them, as they are not trained to consider the social reality of such a religious phenomenon as the return to the sacred in Islamic areas.[40]

More generally, in relation to Middle Eastern studies, Brynen remarks:

> Perhaps the most important issues that can be raised, however, relate to the theoretical underdevelopment of the field and the structural and ideological characteristics of the field which give rise to it. . . . This theoretical underdevelopment is evident not only in absolute terms, but also in comparison with African studies in particular.[41]

He arrives at this conclusion from his own research of quantitative, comparative, and longitudinal content analysis of a few key journals of Middle Eastern studies. R. Brynen goes on to say "existing theories (especially 'grand theories') of development, society, and politics have been found to be generally unuseful or inappropriate in explaining social processes in the Middle East."[42]

Although both Salem and Brynen made their observations in the 1980s – a decade later, I. Abu-Rabi notes that the situation essentially remained unchanged, and there continues to exist a "theoretical inadequacy of the writings on Islamic revivalism."[43] Jennifer Chandler[44] alludes to the fact that there exists an absence of a theory of Islamic revivalism even in the current period because many contemporary writers on Islamic revivalist movements, such as Quintan Wiktorowicz[45] and Mona Younis,[46] opt for the Social Movement Theory for its basic explanatory value in exploring movements of Islamic revivalism. Chandler says that "SMT [Social Movement Theory] draws upon processes and mechanism from rational-choice, structural, and cultural comparative political theo-

ries which enable a stronger explanatory value of understanding of [Islamic revivalism and] actions and outcomes,"[47] but the theory already looks unsatisfactory for not addressing intrinsically religious issues.

This problem is clearly articulated by A. El-Affendi, who attributes this inadequacy to an "absence of religious sociology in the Arab world" and argues that this "shortcoming" can be "attributed to the general ideological environment" in Western scholarship:

> which makes the study of religion from a pure social and scientific perspective a risk with dire consequences. Such an opinion indirectly . . . links the appearance of religious sociology in the West with secularism. The explanation for the lack of religious sociology in the Arab world is related to the continued influence of religion, while the explanation for having a religious sociology in the West rests on the dearth of religion.[48]

I have added to this debate about the absence of a theory of Islamic revivalism and have maintained that given the enormity and significance of the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism, a theory is essential for a better explanation of such a phenomenon.[49] It is with a concrete theoretical explanation that contemporary Islamic revivalism can be appreciated as an important sociological phenomenon.

## The Written Works Advocating Contemporary Islamic Revivalism

In various written works, revival is perceived by its proponents as an essential means of reintroducing and inculcating an Islamic way of life – governed exclusively by the Sharī'ah and experienced by the Ummah (Muslim community). Islamic revival involves a return to the fundamental disciplined foundation of Islam. Islam is not only a religion but a comprehensive way of life. All its rules are embodied in the Sharī'ah, which itself is founded upon the Qur'ān and the Sunnah (the sayings and practices of the Prophet Muḥammad). The proponents of Islamic revivalism seek to reestablish the ethos of this pristine model and to apply it to contemporary circumstances in order to demonstrate Islam's dynamism and its relevance to modernity. Thus, the contemporary revivalists' written works – while not renouncing the era of the Prophet as an ideal – moves to advocate Islam as a broad and dynamic religion inherently capable of meeting the demands of the changing time and space.[50] For Islam to play a complete and vibrant role, the proponents of contemporary Islamic revivalism rally support from all Muslims, encouraging them to form a Muslim brotherhood and an Ummah leading to the construction of a

just and better future for all. As a result, the written works concentrate on the nature of a future being imagined and the likelihood of its acceptance and success.[51] According to this ideology, Muslims are assumed to have a new and prominent role as Allah's vicegerents in order to restore His sovereignty on earth founded upon the injunctions of the Qur'ān.[52]

In a sense, then, such written works on contemporary Islamic revivalism point to a real tension between two great civilizations – Islam and the West – and the recognition by Muslims of their own internal malaise and need of correction.[53] This is a highly complex tension, which prevails in an epoch that itself is enormously complex and fast changing. This epoch is termed modernity. As I already mentioned, the contemporary Islamic revivalism, is a response to the reality of modernity. John Voll expresses this argument by saying that those who seek to revive Islam construct:

> the Islamic discourse in a way that does not attempt to start with [W]estern forms of modern ideas . . . [W]estern ideological formulations, whether liberal or radical, capitalist or communist, are seen by many Muslims as having failed. The emphasis therefore has shifted from "modernizing" Islam to the Islamization of the modern experience.[54]

The Islamization of the modern experience entails the reintroduction of Islamic symbols, rituals, and institutions in the public sphere – rendering religion both a private and public affair. By lifting the ban on Islamic symbols in public spaces and making Islam part and parcel of both private and public life, the modern experience can be one in which Muslims can freely express and enjoy their Islamic identity and heritage.

Those Muslims who have taken a leading role in revitalizing the Islamic faith in recent years reveal this changing context in their thinking. Of course, local conditions are never the same in which the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism finds expression, yet certain broad themes common among the Muslim revivalists have emerged. Two prominent and consistent themes show up in the revivalist thought of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The first theme highlights the key concepts that have been pivotal to the Islamic revivalism of the premodern era and have continued to be part of it in present times. The second theme emphasizes the transformation or the recontextualisation of old concepts to suit modern times.

In the first theme, one key concept in the Islamic revivalist discourse is the notion of revival itself. The concept of revival has two constituent components. One component is *tajdīd* (regeneration), and the other component is *mudjaddīd* (renewer of the faith). Efforts at revitalizing the Muslim community have been made periodically throughout Islamic history. Calls for *tajdīd* in line with Qur'ānic teachings and the ways of the Prophet have been made regularly – particularly in recognition of the need for a centen-

nial regeneration, revival, and reformation of the faith. This is based on the popular belief of *Mahdism* (messianism). This perspective asserts that Allah will send a *mudjaddīd* to the Ummah at the beginning of every century to restore the proper teachings and practices of Islam. While there are disagreements over who the *mudjaddīd*s were in the past and who they are now (and will be in the future), there is an almost total agreement among Muslims about the idea of *mudjaddīd* as an important figure in Muslim society. Revival is pivotal to the Islamic ethos, and many Muslims take the concept literally, putting all their energies into furthering this cause.

Another vital concept, under this theme, is that of *jihād*. It is a complex concept, but in recent years, particularly in the West, it has come to simply mean a 'holy war'. The concept of *jihād* is not restricted to a single meaning, however, nor is its meaning so narrow. In its broadest sense *jihād* means "striving in the path of Allah." The striving can be internally oriented, as practiced by Sufis seeking the spiritual renewal of the self – or externally focused, as often advocated by militants or Islamists calling Muslims to undertake a "holy war." The concept of *jihād* encompasses a number of important efforts, which have been part of Islamic heritage since the early days of Islam. Contemporary revivalists stress the importance of this complex heritage and draw upon it in their efforts to revive Islam in present times.

Fitting into the second theme is the concept of *jāhilīyah* **(i**gnorance or state of un-Islam). It is an Arabic term open to some controversy in the literature over its meaning and its referents. There are some who argue that *jāhilīyah* is the antithesis of *'ilm* (knowledge),[55] and some argue that it is the antithesis of *ḥilm* (gentleness).[56]

Sayed Abul A'ala Maududi was an early pioneer in contemporary revivalist thought who dealt with the concept of *jāhilīyah* in great depth. His work has some resonance in the thinking of Sayyid Qutb. Qutb (1906–1966) as understood *jāhilīyah* as becoming manifest in the modern period. In fact, he refers to the modern period as *jāhilī* (pre-Islamic or the non-Islamic epoch). He argues that the state of *jāhilīyah* is a particular period in time or a condition or set of conditions that can come into being at any time. He reaches the conclusion that the world is in a deep state of *jāhilīyah* despite what may be described as "modern progress," "modern development," and "modern invention" because the very foundation upon which the modern life rests is constructed from human sources. In other words, the sources that shape modern life are not divine and, therefore, not universal and everlasting. He asserts:

> This Jahiliyyah is based on rebellion against God's sovereignty on earth. .. . It is not in that simple and primitive form of the ancient Jahiliyyah,

> but takes the form of claiming that the right to create values, to legislate rules of collective behaviour, and to choose any way of life rests with men, without regard to what God has prescribed.[57]

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, *jāhilīyah* has come to represent the opposite condition of Islam and is an important issue faced in the revivalist rhetoric.[58] ***Jāhilīyah*****,** as an antithesis to Islam in the contemporary period, is far worse than any condition that preceded the advent of Islamic revelation. This is because Muslims – who believe that Islam had dispelled ignorance and darkness fourteen centuries ago and replaced it with the truth – still succumb to a secularized existence so prominent in the West. For the revivalists, who do not know and commit *jāhilī* acts, can be excused – but to know yet not refrain from such acts is inexcusable.

In his study of Qutb's articulation of historical and modern *jāhilīyah*, Youssef M. Choueiri[59] maintains that, prior to the advent of Islam, *jāhilīyah* denoted ignorance due to not understanding the world. However, in the present time, science and rationality have transported humanity into a new realm of knowledgeability, and therefore, human beings can no longer plead ignorance about the world. Thus, *jāhilīyah* in the current period cannot be described as lack of knowledge, but, rather "aggression against God's governance on the earth."[60] It is this latter view that concerns the revivalists the most.

In the second theme – like the concept of *jāhilīyah***,** *tawhīd* (belief in the unity of Allah) is considered by the revivalists to be also vital. *Tawhīd* has a direct connection to the underlying themes and objectives of the historic traditions of Islamic revivalism, which has remained constant. That is, there is an ongoing emphasis on the comprehensiveness and universality of Islam and a strict interpretation of the unity of God, which permits no human sovereignty other than God. At least in the ideal, religion and politics are not distinct spheres. This idea of *tawhīd*, according to the revivalists, needs to be understood not by blindly accepting interpretations put forward by theologians and scholars but by directly drawing on the primary sources, the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, for explanations by exercising *ijtihād*(independent interpretation) of them. Hence one needs to learn and understand the Qur'ān and the Sunnah as part of religious obligation. The role of the *'ulamā'* (Islamic scholars) in all this is merely to facilitate this process. The dependence on *ijtihād* ensures that contemporary Islamic revivalism embodies the continuing dynamism of the Islamic tradition and incorporates it in social, economic, and political planning and developmentsIn their efforts to reenergize and reassert the Islamic message in the present time, the revivalists, therefore, focus on *tawhīd*. In Islamic theology *tawhīd* is a pivotal concept. Prior to the emergence of the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism, the concept of *tawhīd*

was straight forward in meaning. As Abd al-Rahman Azzam simply put it, *tawhīd* "means the act of belief in the oneness of God,"[61] and the concept of *tawhīd* has appeared almost constantly in Muslim intellectual discourse, receiving much attention. For instance, Muhammad Abduh, a Muslim modernist writer from Egypt, deals with the concept of *tawhīd* in great depth in his work. Despite being a modernist Muslim, his understanding of the concept reveals a remarkable concordance with the regular descriptions in Islamic theological thought and articulation. He contends that the:

> theology of unity (tawhid) is the science that studies the being and attributes of God, the essential and the possible affirmations about Him. . . . The original meaning of tawhid is the belief that God is one in inalienable divinity. Thus the whole science of theology is named from the most important of its parts . . . the unity of God in Himself and in the action of creation.[62]

In recent times, however, what Abduh described above as *tawhīd* has been transformed. Maududi redefined and transformed *tawhīd* from being merely a concept into a process. He conceived of *tawhīd* as belief in Allah as well as a practical process in which Allah is revered, obeyed, and worshipped. For Maududi, the proclamation that "there is no divinity but God" is a "summons that man respond to Him with his whole being in exclusive service and obedience and devotion and worship."[63] *Tawhīd* in the contemporary context is more than merely a belief in the unity of Allah. It is a belief but also an action-laden process. In other words, *tawhīd* is a belief in the unity of Allah, and at the same time, the act of implementing that belief in practical reality by doing all that is prescribed in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah.

But let us return to social-scientific assessments.

## Three Key Perspectives on Islamic Revivalism

The explanations for the emergence of contemporary Islamic revivalism are manifold. Some explanations focus on a single variable or factor, while others focus on a combination of variables. Generally speaking, however, explanations of contemporary Islamic revivalism can be divided into two separate categories. In the first category, the explanations primarily center on social, economic, and political variables – and in the second, they consolidate around historical, cultural, and religious variables. A number of writers – like Fouad Zakariyya (2005), M. Tessler (1997), Abdel Salam Sidahmed and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (1996), Sami Fouad Zubaida (1993), and R. Hrair Dekmejian (1985)[64] – fit into the first category. Dekmejian, for example, argues that the multidimen-

sional social crisis caused by social and economic factors provides the catalyst for contemporary Islamic revivalism. He states that "ebb and flow of Islamic [revivalism] throughout history reveals an ongoing dialectic between Islam and its social-economic-political environment."[65]

Like Dekmejian, Zubaida contends that the "root of the 'Islamic phenomenon' are the well known economic and demographic problems and the policy dilemmas they pose for government."[66] Further, she argues that the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism is a modern ideological construct and not the "product of a historical continuity with an essential Islam preserved in the hearts and minds of people."[67] Another writer, Tessler (1997), argues that contemporary Islamic revivalism is the result of poor political and economic circumstances in many Muslim countries and not the outcome of religious and cultural traditions. In the face of rising unemployment, the increasing divide between rich and poor, and lack of opportunities for young men and women in terms of employment and education, Tessler contends that people in the *dār al-Islām* perceive the crisis of their society rooted in the prevailing state of political economy "and they accordingly attribute much of the responsibility for their plight to the political regimes by which they are governed."[68]

He maintains that the failure of their own governments and the precarious local conditions have turned Muslims toward Islam in order to find a sanctuary. Along similar lines, Sidahmed and Ehteshami contend that the social dislocation emerging from or following economic progress, extensive urbanization, rapid modernization, educational improvement, and social development had produced widespread social conflict, dissatisfaction, and disharmony.[69]

Adding to this malaise, they maintain is the constant failure of the state to meet people's social needs in the face of rising economic problems. In their view, "the combination of these factors created fertile ground for the growth of the Islamist forces and [Islamic revivalism]."[70] Zakariyya has significantly added to this small chorus by arguing that "political and economic conditions . . . led to the rise of religious extremism [or Islam] in contemporary Arab world [and beyond].[71]

The criticism leveled against this line of social, economic, and political analysis understandably maintains that these points of views offer a purely secular interpretation of the emergence of contemporary Islamic revivalism. The criticism fails to appreciate the inclusivity of religion and politics in Islam. Scholars like E. Shahin argue that such an explanation de-emphasizes the "role and relevance of religion in social and political development."[72] The essence of this criticism of the social, economic, and political explanation is captured in Ayubi's analysis of the phenomenon of contemporary

Islamic revivalism, which he asserts is the embodiment of diverse revivalist movements. He posits that while it may be true that Islamic revivalist movements came into being from poor social conditions, their emergence cannot be understood just as a doctrine expressing that the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism is just a mechanical reflection of socioeconomic problems. This would be simplistic and ignoring the fact that participants in Islamic revivalist movements, who take their course seriously, have a program and mission to accomplish. Ayubi asserts "Economic, social and political factors may *give rise* to specific movements at specific times, but such movements soon have a logic and a life of their own. . . . It would also be naïve to assume that man has no spiritual and moral needs." [73]

Shireen Hunter (1988) also maintains that although social, economic, and political explanations are important in accounting for the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism, they are nevertheless inadequate.[74] She cites that there are various other elements – cultural, religious, moral, juridical, and psychological ones – that play a crucial role. These have to be taken into consideration – albeit in combination with social, economic, and political factors – to better understand contemporary Islamic revivalism.

In this second category are writers like A. Babeair (1991), J. Donohue (1983), and Johannes J. G Jansen (1986).[75] Babeair (1991), for example, suggests that contemporary Islamic revivalism is a religious and cultural response to life at the conclusion of the twentieth century, and posits that contemporary Islamic revivalism is religiously and culturally a backward-looking process, founded on three basic premises:

- the unchangingness of the world,
- the finality and supremacy of Islam, and
- the veneration of Prophet Muḥammad as the perfect model that Muslims must imitate.[76]

He contends that contemporary Islamic revivalism is an attempt to reestablish Islam as an idealized world religion or culture.

Donohue (1983) also suggests that, while there are indeed economic and political factors involved in raising a Muslim consciousness, contemporary Islamic revivalism is a reassertion of an Islamic identity that is a reaction to a deep-seated, ongoing clash of cultures that are yet to be reconciled.[77] Through his content-analysis research into the literature on Islamic revivalism, Donohue shows the increasing importance of Islam as a key aspect of Muslim identity – in other words, a culturally inspired return to the fundamentals of Islam. Jansen (1986) echoes Donohue's assertion.[78] He believes that contemporary Islamic revivalism is the result of the cultural irreconcilability of Islam with the modern world. This is an ongoing

experience for Muslims that began during the European Renaissance in the fourteenth century.

I. Abu-Rabi (1994) is another writer whose analysis of the emergence of contemporary Islamic revivalism focuses on an historical analysis of Islam.[79] His key assertion is that Islamic revivalism is a historical phenomenon and that any understanding of it in its latter-day presentation must definitely "integrate the historical reality of Western exploitation of the Muslim world into coherent system of analysis."[80] For his part as an important theorist, Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (1982) worries about laboring over historical, cultural, and religious factors when the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism first and foremost needs "to be interdisciplinary, comparative, and integrative"[81] and bring in all current social issues to throw light on new revivalist developments. He goes on to say that contemporary Islamic revivalisms

> have to be seen in relation to the specific process of social change taking place in [specific Muslim] societies, in particular to issues of the changing position of classes and groups, political participation, identity crisis, the stability of regimes, and distributive justice.[82]

Raymond Hinnebusch (1982) makes similar observations that emphasizee the interchange between sectarian, regional, and class factors in directly contributing to a return to the fundamentals of Islam.[83] To some extent Dessouki and Hinnebusch bridge the two main modes of explanation.

From the two abovementioned explanatory categories emerge three key perspectives for explaining the emergence of the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism. These are:

- the socio-economic and political – together called the "crisis perspective,"
- the "success perspective," and
- the"crisis of modernity perspective."

I have adopted these three key perspectives in this paper because they collectively offer multidimensional insights critical to a better sociological understanding into the recent emergence of Islamic revivalism en face with modernity.

## Socioeconomic and Political, or the Crisis Perspective

Exponents adopting the crisis perspective see in contemporary Islamic revivalism a manifestation of a society in crisis, and the solution to the crisis as a return to a pristine Islam. Acknowledging that in the current stage of the development of Islamic revivalism, it is not possible to identify an exact

cluster of catalysts, this perspective identifies numerous causal factors perceived responsible for the degeneration of Muslim societies – with the revivalists seen as seeking to return to the fundamentals of Islam as the solution.

R. Hrair Dekmejian points out that a general analysis about Islamic revivalism reveals that the return to Islamic teaching in recent times seems to be a natural reaction to the ongoing experience of crisis in Muslim societies. He assets that:

> This protracted crisis milieu included the disorienting political, economic and social impact of Western and Soviet imperialism . . . the emergence of Western and Marxist secularist ideological movements. . . . Consequently, the catalysts of the crisis environment which appear to have triggered a return to Islamic roots are multi-dimensional.[84]

He then identifies these catalysts as identity conflict, class conflict, political conflict, cultural crisis, legitimacy crisis, and military impotence – arguing that "to an increasing number of alienated Muslims, Islam does appear to provide a practical political alternative as well as a secure spiritual niche and psychological anchor in a turbulent world."[85]

The socioeconomic and political or crisis perspective stresses the significance of the underlying continuities within Islamic traditions with Islam construed as a haven catering for everyone, but more advantageously for those who have found themselves marginalized in the modern world. Given the tremendous changes brought about by modernization and development, many aspects of the Islamic faith, familiar to Muslims and to which they can relate, have remained constant. For instance, the festivals of *'Īd du l-Fiṭr* (the festival celebrated at the end of the holy month of Ramadān) and *'Īd du l-'Aḍḥā* (the festival of sacrifice).

John Esposito, another proponent of this perspective, locates the quandary of Muslim society in the context of European colonialism maintaining that the advent of colonialism produced a major crisis of Muslim identity. "The disintegration of the traditional Islamic political order and the struggle against European colonialist intervention and rule provided both an identity crisis and a political purpose for Muslims in the twentieth century."[86] He identifies the following two key factors responsible for the revival of Islam in recent history:

> an identity crisis precipitated by a sense of utter impotence, disillusionment, and loss of self-esteem [and] disillusionment with the West and the failure of many governments to respond adequately to the political and socio-economic needs of their societies.[87]

## Success Perspective

In contrast to the previous view, the success perspective lays emphasis on the changes implemented by Muslims in their societies. They are seen as significant contributing factors in rejuvenating Islam since the 1970s. The success perspective uses as its point of departure a particular crucial aspect of Islamic experience. Within Islam there has been a positive relationship between historical success and the correct observance of Islamic teachings. Muslim success was the outcome of a proper and full implementation of God's Will. The failure of Muslims was, according to Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1957), the broken link between proper adherence to Islamic faith and mundane affairs.[88] And this broken link needed to be fixed by Muslims by returning to the straight path of Islam.

According to Daniel Pipes, the social ills that plagued the *dār al-Islām* (abode of Islam),were because "Muslims abandoned Islamic political customs and goals during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the West enjoyed predominant power."[89] The solution to this malaise was simply a return to Islamic fundamentals – the Qur'ān and the practices of Prophet Muḥammad. Hence, according to John Voll (1982) the 1970s saw Muslims, particularly the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC) gain some international political influence as a result of oil wealth and active participation by prominent Muslims in global issues then started to occur.[90] This led to the recognition of Muslim societies as important partners in the global community.[91] Casting their vision on Islamic success in history, Muslims realized the link between success and proper observance of their faith.

Pipes contends that certain significant events – such as the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Arab oil embargo, and the Iranian Revolution of 1978–79 – provided Muslims with a much needed boost in confidence.[92] Suddenly emboldened, Muslims and revivalists came to realize the potency of Islam and how they might change their predicament by strictly adhering to Islamic precepts. They interpreted this political and military success as evidence of the power of Islam. However, according to Pipes, Muslim success and enhanced self-image, was due to one single important factor and that was oil revenues.[93] Pipes explains that the 1970s saw oil boom in Muslim countries, and this gave Muslims an economic power that they did not have had for a long time and helped them to force their Christian nemesis to pay for the consequences of its actions. With the help of the oil money, to some extent, Muslims were able to put a stop to their degeneration, and after a long time, some even began to enjoy the wealth and power bestowed to them as

true believers by God. Pipes claims that "The oil boom marked a turning point in Muslim consciousness: more than anything else, it prepared the way for widespread Islamic political activity."[94]

Thus, according to the success perspective, success and wealth produced power, and power led to Islamic revivalism.

## Crisis of Modernity Perspective

The last perspective, which is the defensive reaction[95] to the crisis of modernity, acknowledges the multidimensionality of the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism and asserts that this sociologically significant phenomenon cannot be explained adequately by a single factor or by one set of factors to the exclusion of others. There is no rational basis to treat relevant factors in a mutually exclusive way. According to this third perspective, there is an overlap between the first two – and in any case, the explanation for the emergence of contemporary Islamic revivalism is best served by a synthesis of all the key factors into an integrative analysis.

According to this third perspective, Islamic revivalism is a defensive reaction to modernity and a response to unfavorable conditions that exists in it. This does not mean Islamic revivalism is against modernization per se, but rather it is anti-Westernization and anti-secularization. Those holding this perspective maintain that the catalysts for contemporary Islamic revivalism are the negative consequences of the processes of modernization. The modernization model and the political elites linked to it have been unsuccessful in preventing the decline of the Muslim world and its political and economic dependency on the West. A number of scholars have taken this stance namely Fazlur Rahman (1982), C. Keyder (1995), Shireen Hunter (1988), Nazih N. M. Ayubi (1991), Lawrence Kaplan (1992), Bassam Tibi (1993, 1988), Martin E and R. Scott Appleby (1993), Everett Mendelsohn (1993), F. Lechner (1995), E. Sivan (1995), Y. Choueiri (1996), Roy (2001), A. El-Affendi (2003), Raymond Willliam Baker (2003), Mansoor Moaddel, (2005), and M. Masud (2009).[96]

Hunter who favors this perspective explains that although material modernity brought about some positive changes in society and old sociopolitical institutions and patterns of relationships were removed, apparently they were not replaced with new ones. Consequently, a vast majority of people were left feeling a strong sense of psychological, social, and political alienation. These feelings forced them to seek refuge and a sense of belonging and an anchorage in a way of life that was pursued in the past governed by religious imperatives. She argues that "In the context of Islamic countries, that has meant a return to Islam."[97]

Thus, modernization has been largely unsuccessful in creating a just foundation for world societies and overcoming the social ills that have plagued humanity for a long while now. As Ayubi argues:

> When modernisation stumbled, failing to achieve the promised economic development and instead deepening the alienation and dependency of society, groups that were previously excluded or were promised what was never given, came forward with their alternative ideational system: 'Islam.'[98]

Similarly, Keyder argues that when Muslims failed to benefit from capitalism and modernization, they turned their backs on them and accepted revivalism as "a community-building movement, seeking to keep the noxious effects of the market, which is identified with secularist immorality, out of the community of believers."[99] The failure in these secular modes of life invited a return to Islam for resolution, solace, and refuge.

E. Sivan is another scholar who maintains that the return to the fundamentals of Islam is the result of the community of believers formulating – from the symbols rooted in tradition – its own worldview, which stands in stark contrast to the modern worldview.[100] He suggests that revivalists see modernity as "humanity's revolt against God."[101] He says that revivalists see modernity as a state of *jāhilīyah* **(**ignorance or state of un-Islam), which "consists of rejecting the sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) of Allah by replacing his laws with ones made by man . . . [and] a paganism reminiscent of the first century as Darwinism, materialism, and other human-centred paradigms loom as idols."[102]

Sivan's thesis is that modernity is perceived by revivalists "as lifestyle geared to serve human self-realization, even if by transgressing (or adapting and subverting) God-prescribed (*shari'a*) rules of conduct."[103] Wedged between Islam and *jāhilīyah*, the revivalists embark on the mission to revive and secure Islam by retreating "into the enclave community, shoring up their social and physical boundaries, and from there branching out, as circumstances permit, into educational and welfare extensions and local political work."[104]

Everett Mendelsohn maintains that contemporary Islamic revivalism is not anti-modernity but a defensive reaction to it, that revivalists "seek in their educational and political programs to construct a viable synthesis between tradition and modernity."[105] He suggests that the commonly held belief that science and technology, which are the manifestations of modernization and whose ownership erroneously rests with the West, are challenged by the revivalists. According to Mendelsohn, revivalists claim that science has its origins in Abrahamic monotheism.[106] Religious revivalism

is not an attempt to reconcile religion with science but to regain "ownership and control of things inspired and nurtured in their traditions before the secularising Enlightenment separated scientia from its ties to revealed religion."[107] Mendelsohn posits that revivalists believe that the disjoining of religion and science, or the process of secularization, has effectively removed all the restraints against what may be described in revivalist language as harmful forces of modern science and technology. Created by God to operate in perfect harmony to control nature, the Enlightenment project accompanied by the secularization process at the advent of modernity has inappropriately introduced rivalry between science and religion, and consequently produced adverse impacts on nature. In this context, the revivalists have emerged as "the restorers of the lost harmony."[108]

Similarly, A. Dessouki finds that contemporary Islamic revivalism is a defensive reaction to modernity, particularly Western secularism.[109] Agreeing with Dessouki and the abovementioned authors, Bassam Tibi likewise considers contemporary Islamic revivalism "a religious response to modernity."[110] Modernity is reflected in science and technology which is closely associated with the West. But science, Tibi maintains, is a "cultural product," and the modern world, apart from its coalescing qualities, is a culturally plural reality. Hence, the reactionary attitude toward the West by non-Western peoples – including Muslims – is not necessarily against science and technology, but rather against the superiority complex of the West and its cultural impositions. Tibi asserts that although the revivalists demand "the de-Westernization of knowledge," they nevertheless look favorably toward science and technology and therefore are not anti-modernity but anti-Westernization and anti-secularization. Islamic revivalism means "protest against Western cultural hegemony" and its secularism, but not "a wholesale rejection of the scientific and technological achievements of the West."[111]

Furthermore, Fazlur Rahman claims that contemporary Islamic revivalism, which he calls "neorevivalism" or "neofundamentalism," is a reaction against modernity, or in his words against "classical modernism."[112] He sees contemporary Islamic revivalism in a very important way to be unique because of its anti-Western, and by implication, anti-Westernism stance. Contemporary Islamic revivalism is a rejection of classical modernism because of its completely Westernizing force.[113]

On Rahman's reckoning:

> The neorevivalism has undoubtedly served as a correction not only for several types of excesses in classical modernism but, above all, for secularist trends that would otherwise have spread much faster

> in Muslim societies. That is to say, neorevivalism has reoriented the modern-educated lay Muslim *emotionally* toward Islam.[114]

F. Rajaee reinforces this defensive reaction to modernity thesis and contends that contemporary Islamic revivalism is a response "to the *consequences* of modernity – to its political (i.e., colonialism), educational (i.e., new school systems and modern institutions of learning), and ideological (i.e., the ideologies of nationalism, democracy, and socialism by-products)."[115] And Olivier Roy has recently claimed that contemporary Islamic revivalism is of course a modern phenomenon – nevertheless, a response "of anti-colonialism, of anti-imperialism, which today has simply become anti-Westernism."[116]

Summarizing the thrust of this perspective, El-Affendi sees movements that collectively constitute contemporary Islamic revivalism are typically "established in the environment of modernity and are a response to it. They are also Islamic in the sense that they have selected an Islamic response to the challenges of modernity that is based on Islamic authority."[117]

## The Ideology of Contemporary Islamic Revivalism

The quintessential role of theory and philosophy is to explain and provide an understanding of the complexities and the nature of any phenomenon. Ideology, by contrast, is much more clearly involved in the quest to fulfill social objectives. It is, in fact, an idea system that seeks to interpret anew the world and at the same time transform it. Thus, "Ideology is an ingredient of society which cannot be subdivided into a base-superstructure scheme: ideology and social structure are in a dialectical not a schematic causal relationship."[118]

Islamic revivalists have an articulated ideology and definitive plan. They generally:

> operate out of an acute sense of the rational need for change on the individual and community levels: the individual, through a comprehensive process of socialization and mobilization; and the community, through the integration of Islamic values into the political, economic, and administrative structure of society.[119]

Islam reinforces group norms and provides for the institution of moral sanctions for individual behavior. Family, *jum'ah* (Friday congregational prayer) gathering, and *shūrā* (consultative committee) are three good examples of this. Further, Islam provides universal goals and values that in turn offer a sense of stability and unity to the Ummah (Muslim community), and contribute to its security and the maintenance of its equilibrium. This makes revivalism an attempt to reestablish an Islamic order modeled

on a pristine Islam, free from accretions and foreign influences. As James Piscatori observes, "[the] common approach among Muslims themselves stresses the imperative of returning to an unadulterated version of Islam in order to overcome the debased politics of our age."[120]

With the commitment and religious serious existence of Muslims governed by the Sharī'ah – a society in which justice, equality, peace, moral purity, ethical standards, cooperation, stability, prosperity, and progress prevail that can be achieved through a pure Islamic polity.[121] Moral purity, therefore, is the key aspect of revivalist ideology. To be a complete and a true Muslim, one has to live in an Islamic state governed by the Sharī'ah and pursuing a divinely commissioned purpose.[122] In revivalist circles, this is an important issue and to achieve this social goal one has to properly adhere to Islamic teachings in a properly established Islamic state. Untainted morality is achievable for the revivalist movements, not through rationality but through serious observance of the Sharī'ah.[123] Islam is *dīn wa-dawla* (religion and state) precisely because morality is absolute. Thus, revivalist ideology conceives of Islam as an all-encompassing system embodying social, economic, political, and spiritual aspects of life into one complete and holistic order.[124]

## The Objectives of Contemporary Islamic Revivalism

Contemporary Islamic revivalism is an attempt to bring about personal and social change. The world is in crisis and therefore change is necessary. Change denotes making necessary adjustments in the material world and the pursuit of life in the full light of the Sharī'ah.[125] Spiritually oriented revivalists – such as the members of the *Tablīgh Jamā'at* (Convey [message of Islam] Group) – seek indirect transformation of society. They emphasize self-reformation, arguing that social change depends on individual change. They take a bottom-up approach to change in society. The politically oriented revivalists such as the *Jamā'at-i Islāmī* (Islamic Organization) seek change beyond the individual level. They insist on regaining political power. They strive for the removal of authoritarian, repressive, and unrepresentative regimes and for the creation of Islamic institutions as a priority. To achieve placing the Ummah under a pious caliph is to restore justice, equity and humility, and promote public and private piety. In this light, Ahmad Moussalli remarks:

> Islam's main goal, from the [revivalist] perspective, is the unity of races, peoples, and societies; its necessary concomitant principle is eliminating the multiplicity of systems, institutions, and sources of conflict and confrontations, such as nationalism, patriotism, racism, ideologies, and economic interests.[126]

Revivalists hope to turn the direction of life from secularism to spiritualism. In their view political stability, social equilibrium, and economic prosperity in society all depend on spirituality not on materialism. Thus, as Emid Eldin Shahin explains, the goal of revivalists is not to hasten development and growth or to obstruct the prevailing changes that are occurring in society. Their focus is to redirect "the political orientation of their respective countries from secularism to Islamism."[127]

In order to understand the objectives of revivalist movements, it is critical to examine the relationship between religion, politics, and society in Islam. Of course, one of the primary objectives is the establishment of an Islamic state, but how might a revivalist movement of religion-political orientation be understood? There is a diversity of explications attempted by various modern Sunni theorists.[128] One way to understand this is to take the Islamic state to mean what John Esposito describes as "a community of believers."[129] The legitimacy of the Islamic state hinges on a social philosophy of life, and a specific political and moral philosophy.[130] This, however, does not address the question of what an Islamic state should be in its nature, its function, and its foundational basis. Therefore, there are some (the liberal modernists) who claim that a state that employs Islamic values, symbols, and institutions –such as that proposed and implemented in Egypt by Gamal Abdel Nasser –is minimally sufficient for Muslims to live under.[131] A state that roots its ideology in the Islamic heritage and accepts science and technology, but rejects foreign ideology such as Western capitalism, communism and socialism, is tolerable. Then, there are others who argue that then complete implementation of the Sharī'ah by the state is what gives it an Islamic character, credibility, and legitimacy.

The contemporary concept of an Islamic state is elusive. After the abolition of the Ottoman Empire by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in 1924, numerous thinkers emerged to offer new explanations of the relationship between religion and politics, and what entails an Islamic state. Sayed Abul-A'ala Maududi was prominent among these thinkers. At the outset, his conception of the Islamic state and his ideas about the relationship between religion and politics seemed to be a modernization of the classical theory of the caliphate. However, upon revisiting his work it seems that his primary concern was the application of the Sharī'ah in the affairs of the state. His challenge was to give birth to a state that embodied his idea of the Ummah. Maududi believed that religion – *dīn* – and politics were intertwined together.[132] He also asserted that "[T]he chief characteristic of Islam is that it makes no distinction between the spiritual and the secular life."[133]

Maududi contended that in order to be a Muslim, as articulated by the *dīn*, individual Muslims had to struggle for a caliphate, for only within the structural boundary of the caliphate could Muslims live a truly Islamic life and have a truly Islamic identity.[134] The caliphate was required because Islam as a way of life would not find full and proper expression in everyday Muslim living unless Islam itself controlled the power structures.[135] Therefore from Maududi's perspective Islamic revivalism depended on its control of political power.

Maududi maintained that the Sharī'ah had to be given prominence over modern laws and implemented both in public and private affairs of Muslim experience. For the Sharī'ah to gain clear prominence, it would have to pervade all aspects of social conduct and reassert the inclusivity of religion and politics.[136] This would be an unequivocal manifestation of the faith, and to ignore or even deny it would be to reject the need to be a true Muslim. Maududi saw no hope for progress and salvation for Muslims outside the Islamic structure, and that a secular political order was an impediment to the full implementation of Islamic faith. Thus, he rendered politics sacred, asserting:

> If you believe in God and His Prophet and accept the Qur'an as the Book of God, then inevitably you have to use moral principles which Islam teaches and will have to accept the political principles which it has given.[137]

The Ummah could only really come into being with the establishment of the caliphate. The Muslim identity that corresponded with Maududi's notion of Islamic existence could only become a reality with its clear endorsement by an Islamic government. Therefore, the caliphate was not just a means for bringing into being the Ummah; it was at the same time a model for ideal government with universal relevance.[138]

From a secular or Western perspective of state theories, this proposed Islamic model has some fundamental problems. The problem is in the fact that while the modern state model and the international system of states are founded upon a secular principle,[139] the Islamic model of the state is an embodiment of religion and politics as an inclusive unitary system. Conceptually and pragmatically they are mutually exclusive. Thus, an Islamic state cannot be modern, as David George explains:

> Modern states exist only as parts of this international order and by virtue of its secular law. . .. As components of the international system of states, then, Muslim states, qua states, are no less secular than their non-Muslim counterparts. By the same token, an Islamic state is a contingent impossibility, a sheer contradiction in terms; Islam and the secular are mutually exclusive.[140]

From Maududi's perspective, for the Islamic state to have any credibility and legitimacy there has to be a total removal of the current world order, and the void thus created has to be filled by an Islamic system.

## Conclusion

The written material on contemporary Islamic revivalism demonstrates that it is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. This phenomenon has its roots in European colonialism and it is a defensive reaction to the crisis or consequences of modernity. It is, however, by no means a new phenomenon. What distinguishes it from past revivalisms, particularly in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is that while in the past revivalism of Islam was bent on reconstructing Islamic spirituality and morality based on a pristine Islam, contemporary Islamic revivalism goes a step further to mount a defensive reaction against the status quo – that is, a defensive reaction against modernity specifically against Westernization and secularization, both of which are seen by revivalists as principal causes of the crisis or failure of modernity.

The bulk of the written material on contemporary Islamic revivalism examines the attempt by revivalists to rebuild an Islamic order as an alternative to Western modernity, which Islamic revivalists claim has failed humanity dismally. Islam has to reemerge as a universal system to save the world from sliding into irreversible *jāhilīyah* (ignorance or a state of un-Islam). For Islam to reassert itself as a global power, Muslims have to remove all the accretions and innovations from everyday life and return to the fundamentals of Islam. The reemergence of a pristine Islam, on which are based Muslim identity and cultural values, will only occur when Muslims will accept and implement internal *jihād* (on the self) and external *jihād* (on foreign forces and influences – modernity), argue the revivalists.

Most importantly, however, the written material on contemporary Islamic revivalism reveals the absence of a theory of contemporary Islamic revivalism, therefore presenting a problem for a comprehensive sociological understanding of the phenomenon. Although the sociological understanding of contemporary Islamic revivalism remains inadequate and further research and study into it are necessary, the main concepts, objectives, ideology, and most importantly the three key perspectives on contemporary Islamic revivalism come a long way in providing an insight into this important sociological phenomenon.

## Notes

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7. R. Dekmejian, "The Anatomy of Islamic Revival: Legitimacy Crisis, Ethnic Conflict and the Search for Islamic Alternatives," 1–12; S. Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State*; Tessler, "The Origins

of Popular Support for Islamist Movements: A Political Economy Analysis," 93–126.

8. Pipes, "This World is Political!!: The Islamic Revival of the Seventies," 17–39; Voll, *Islam*; J. Esposito, "Muslim Perspectives on A Resurgent Islam," 215–17.
9. Cultural purification through the removal of ethnic and accreted traditional values.
10. John Esposito, "Introduction: Islam and Muslim Politics," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. J. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983a), 3–15; Shireen Hunter, "Introduction," in *The Politics of Islamic Revivalism: Diversity and Unity*, ed. Hunter (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), ix–xv.
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19. Hunter, "Introduction," ix–xv.
20. Ibid., ix–xv.
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