



ISLAM: RENEWAL AND WORLDVIEW

From Criticism to Formation

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Historic failure and awareness of the outside world

While the 1960s and 1970s heralded a break with prevailing culture and tradition, which were seen as the cause of the Arabs' backwardness, the 1980s marked the peak of the Arab Marxist elites' demand for a complete eradication of the heritage as the only way to liberate the masses.

In the Arab East Yasin al Hafidh went so far as to declare: "Marxism has given me a comprehensive revolutionary plan which is destined to destroy the ramshackle, outdated structure that is Arab society today and replace it with a modern, just and rational society"¹.

The modernistic discourse at the Western end of the Arab world was no less radical. Abdullah al Araoui

¹ Yasin al Hafidh: *Al Hazimah wa'l Aidiolujyah al Mahzumah*, Dar al Tali'ah, Beirut, 1979.



asserted that the Arabs were still refusing to carry out a cultural revolution that would recognize the “unity and direction of history which entails throwing that so-called rationalist and modernization movement into the sea”¹.

One feature of this Arab discourse was that it legitimized violence, which saw it in a historic context as being permissible even against the masses themselves, since it was “possible that those most prone to benefit from change might be the greatest obstacle to its taking place”².

This approach sparked a reaction which recognised objectively that the nihilistic trend adopted by the Arab modernists with their talk of the “inevitability of history” had now gone beyond all acceptable bounds. In response, the counter-movement adopted a discourse that rejected concepts such as “inevitable”, the “necessity of sacrifice”, and “the use of violence – if need be” - against broad sections of Arab society.

This was the start of the idea of “renewal”.

Renewal did not involve a total rejection of modernisation, but an acceptance of its main premise, which may be summed up briefly as “confronting the great historic failure” – a confrontation which first began in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The thing that distinguished the “Arab renewalists” from those of their Arab elite predecessors who sought to join the mainstream of history was their critical attitude to the “inevitable” and other concepts embraced by leading Arab and Islamic intellectuals in their voyage of doubt through their cultural heritage.

Two observations might be appropriate here. Firstly, it could be said that the Arab renewal involved more than disengagement from the systems of the past; indeed, unlike the Arab-Islamic elites from the end of the eighteenth century, it no longer questioned their validity.

1 Abdullah al Araoui in *Thaqafatuna fi Dhaw'i'l Tarikh*, Al Markaz al Thaqafi'l 'Arabi, Casablanca, 1983. and in *Al 'Arab wa'l Fikr al Tarikhi*, Dar al Haqiqah, Beirut, 1980.

2 Mustafa Hijazi: *Al Takhalluf al Ijtima'i Madkhal li Sikulujiyati'l Insani'l Maqhur*, Al Markaz al Thaqafi'l 'Arabi, Casablanca, 8th impression, 2001.



A second novel feature was its strongly critical attitude to the “heritage school”, which had always been attracted to the idea of a heritage based on traditional intellectual structures and was unable to think outside them. One of the renewal’s main achievements was its ability to establish a space between itself and its intellectual, creedal, doctrinal and social heritage, and this enabled it to adopt a rational approach to its legacy and history.

These two points highlight the main feature of the new trend – the creation of an alternative awareness that went beyond the merely descriptive and, by correcting the deficiencies of the old institutional and legal systems, refused to accept a recycling of the old styles of knowledge.

The most important aspect, however, was a recognition that it was time to put an end to ignorance about the outside world¹.

In this respect renewal and Arab modernism are no different from the reform movement that preceded them. All three recognise the “oneness of history”, in which the peoples of the world enjoy a shared ability to work together for the sake of progress; this in turn means that the Muslim peoples need to take a new look at themselves and re-evaluate their situation in the world.

In asserting that mankind shares a common history, the “renewal discourse” unhesitatingly embraces the principle of “cross-culturalisation” – i.e. assimilating new knowledge, systems and values in order to acquire a deeper understanding of oneself. This principle rejects imitation in all its forms – whether of the “modernist” or “traditional” variety.

“Cross-culturalisation” aims to bridge the knowledge gap that separates the Arabs (including their elites) from the modern world. It rejects the modernistic tendency to surrender to “historical inevitability”, which accepts the idea of embracing other cultures without actually contributing to them. Instead, it seeks to reconstruct the values of modern culture, but without allowing the process to distance the Arab elites from the societies to which they belong.

1 Abdel Ilah Belqaziz: *Al Dawla fi'l Fikri'l Islami'l Mu'asir*, Arab Unity Studies Centre, 2nd impression, 2004.



This means that renewal represents a new and different kind of self-awareness in which cross-culturalisation plays an instrumental role and produces a form of coexistence in which the old division of the world into *Dar al Islam* (House of Islam) and *Dar al Harb* (House of War) no longer exists. The Arab renewalists aim to imbue the elites and the masses with a recognition that the greatest impediments to progress need to be diagnosed in global terms. In other words, the renewal discourse can only yield results if the issues it deals with can be considered on the basis of modern man's situation in the wider world of today. If he continues to think within his own narrow cultural boundaries while rejecting or ignoring other cultures, he will remain stuck in his own traditions and incapable of effective action or creativity¹.

This is the main challenge - an awareness of the shared nature of human history that will enable the Arab and Muslim elites to examine their beliefs and ideas within a global intellectual context. If this can be achieved, a people's "specific" characteristics will no longer belong – as was the case in the past – to the narrow realm of tribal and partisan values and ideas, but will become global concepts with a broad human dimension that demand to be considered from a global perspective.

The first generation and the problems they faced in the beginning

The realisation that there was a need for an intellectual reawakening and a new approach was not just something that happened suddenly out of the blue.

It began when some of the first generation of scholars and academics started to tackle specific intellectual issues, while others turned to speculation. In both cases they aimed to identify and examine the positive elements of the heritage. One of the main achievements of this early period was a decision to abandon a strict adherence to sectarian doctrines and creeds and re-examine them against the background of the heritage.

Although these efforts did not lead to a new way of thinking, they enabled the heritage's religious content to be re-evaluated through a scrutiny of its writings on *tafseer* (interpretation), *usul* ("roots") and *kalam* (theology).

¹ Radhwan al Sayyid: *Siyasaat al Islam al Mu'asir*, Dar al Kitab al 'Arabi, Beirut, 1st impression, 1997.



The efforts of this early generation may have fluctuated between accommodation and criticism, but they sought to distance themselves from the modern Salafist line that had first seen the light of day in Nejd during the thirteenth century AH (nineteenth century CE) before spreading out across the Arabian Peninsula and beyond.

That movement had been started by Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Wahhab with the aim of reawakening the public's religious conscience and freeing it from heresy and wrong practices. The early "renewalist" generation, on the other hand, did not channel all their efforts into upholding orthodox Islamic beliefs and doctrines. The initiatives embarked upon by some reformist groups and elites in Turkey, India, Egypt and parts of the Islamic West had nothing in common with the introspective approach of the latter-day Salafists, who sought to restore Islamic values and behaviour across the Muslim world by reconnecting it with its religious heritage and had no interest in recent developments in the Islamic countries or in contemporary global ideological trends and modern knowledge. To put it briefly, the basic ideological difference was between the early champions of renewal and the traditionalists.

The Salafist trend was ideologically inspired by two principles:

1. Pristine purity and a return to the virtues of the past.
2. A religion-based view of society and man. This kind of theocratic vision lacks any historical perspective and only sees mankind within a moral/religious context.

In contrast to these principles, the ideology of the early "renewalists" was based on:

1. Promoting an awareness of history and recognising its role in political and social life.
2. The principle of accepting truths and facts on the basis of evidence. Doing so would enable people to assimilate the positive aspects of other cultures and reassess Islamic values and concepts in the light of the demands of the modern age.

This kind of approach was designed to help prepare the ground for



tackling the cultural failings that have sapped people's sense of identity and undermined its credibility and significance¹.

However, while they have been by no means negligible, efforts at renewal have failed to go beyond the stage of "reaching an accommodation" with modern ideas and narrowing the gap between more traditional ways of thinking and the new global reality.

Some modernists have claimed that a return to one's traditional roots is an implicit criticism of the present day and the more recent past; in their view, the problem lies in the Arab way of thinking which is out of touch with the modern world. However, while it has drawn inspiration from modern approaches and ideas, this attitude is not really more than just a feeling that renewal is a good thing. That is to say, it is not robust enough to separate the heritage from an inward-looking obsession with tradition. It has not been able to release the hereditary cultural system's latent potential and create a modern identity with a new historical character.

Openness and the formation stage

Despite the above, during the 1940s and subsequent years an unprecedented Arab "renewalist" movement produced a second generation that developed a clearer vision of what renewal actually entailed. It began with Amin al Khouli (d. 1386 AH/1966), who wrote about renewal in religion and the religious sciences and believed in adopting a modern approach within the context of the heritage.

One of his best-known works on the subject was *Manahij al Tajdid fi'l Nahuw wa'l Balaghah wa'l Tafsir*². It was followed in the 1950s by Abdul Muta'al al Sa'idi's *Al Mujaddidun fi'l Islam mina'l Qarni'l Awwal ila'l Qarni'l Rabi' Ashr*, in which the author – a pupil of Imam Mohammed Abduh – made a study of Qur'anic and Hadith texts in an attempt to prove that Islam is capable of renewal. In his book he suggested that Muslims should stop

1 Burhan Ghalioun: *Ightiyal al 'Aql Mihnat al Thaqaqah al 'Arabiyyah baina'l Tab'iyyah wa'l Salafiyyah*, Dar al Tanwir, Beirut, 1986.

2 Amin al Khouli: *Manahij al Tajdid fi'l Nahuw wa'l Balaghah wa'l Tafsir wa'l Adab*, Dar al Ma'rifah, Cairo, 1st impression, 1961.



waiting for *al Mahdi al Muntadhar* (the Awaited Mahdi) and “replace him with the notion of *al Mujaddid al Muntadhar* (the Awaited Renewer), who will revive their fortunes in the present age”¹.

Like the previous generation, Al Sa’idi did not go beyond the stage of “reaching an accommodation” with renewal and he did not distance himself from the Salafist line that rejected *bida’* (“innovation” in religious practices and beliefs) and sought to return to the roots of the Faith. This was partly due to the neo-reformist course endorsed by Rashid Ridha and the school of al Afghani and Abduh.

A major development during the second generation era was the translation into Arabic of a book by Mohammed Iqbal under the title *Tajdid al Tafkir al Dini fi’l Islam* (Renewal of Religious Thought in Islam)². This writer made a crucial contribution toward moving the concept of renewal towards the formation stage and finally consigning the disapproval, uneasiness and ambiguity that had surrounded it to the dustbin of history.

Mohammed Iqbal was the first Muslim thinker in modern times to address the Arab elites on the concept of renewal from within their own cultural sphere. The aim was to gain recognition for the concept on the basis of an intellectual system that could generate new knowledge through a process of interaction between traditional and modern ways of thinking.

Even so, the book failed to arouse the interest or debate that had been hoped, because in the 1950s and the following two decades Arab and Islamic thought was preoccupied with other ideas than the ones posited by Iqbal.

However, developments in the Arab world during the 1970s enabled a reappraisal to be carried out on Mohammed Iqbal’s renewal thesis. Two factors were significant here. Firstly, that period saw an end to the decline of the reformist school – a decline that had been caused by the spread of modernist ideas and a commonly held view that reform was a Western-

1 Abdul Muta’al al Sa’idi: *Al Mujaddidun fi’l Islam*, Maktabat al Aadaab, Cairo, 1st impression.

2 Mohammed Iqbal: *Tajdid al Tafkir al Dini fi’l Islam* (Renewal of Religious Thought in Islam), translated by Abbas Mahmoud, Cairo, Lajnat al Ta’lif wa’l Tarjumah wa’l Nashr, 2nd impression, Cairo, 1968.



inspired notion. Secondly, the modernist tendency that linked backwardness with Islam and rejected the heritage in all its aspects found itself in a cultural and ideological quandary.

Arab intellectuals began to look at Iqbal's renewalist ideas with new eyes. Hisham Ja'it in Tunisia¹ began to take them up to some extent, while Mohammed 'Aziz al Hababi in Morocco was even more responsive². Then some of the leaders of the modernist tendency – including Taha Hussein and Zaki Naguib Mahmoud - began to review their position.

After this a clutch of writers came to the fore including Hassan Hanafi³, Mohammed Abed al Jabri⁴, Mohammed Arkoun⁵, Fahmi Jad'an⁶, Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman⁷, Taha Jabir al Alwani⁸, Abu'l Qasim Hajj Hamad⁹, the progressive Islamists¹⁰ and Yahya Mohammed¹¹, to name but a few. Their main focus was on defining a new relationship with the heritage and

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- 1 Hisham Ja'it: *Al Shakhsiyyah al 'Arabiyyah al Islamiyyah wa'l Masir al 'Arabi*, Dar al Tali'ah, Beirut, 1984.
 - 2 Mohammed al Aziz al Hababi: *Mina'l Ka'in ila'l Shakhs: Dirasat fi'l Shakhsaniyyah al Waqi'iyah*, Dar al Ma'aref, Cairo, 1962 – *Al Shakhsiyyah al Islamiyyah*, Dar al Ma'aref, Cairo, 1969.
 - 3 Hasan Hanafi: *Al Turath wa'l Tajdid*, Maktabat al Anglo-Misriyyah, Cairo, 1977.
 - 4 Mohammed Abed al Jabri: *Naqd al 'Aql al 'Arabi: Takwin al 'Aql al 'Arabi*, Dar al Tali'ah, Beirut, 1984. *Nahnu wa'l Turath: Qira'at Mu'asirah fi Turathina al Falsafi*, Al Markaz al Thaqafi'l 'Arabi, Casablanca, 1980.
 - 5 Mohammed Arkoun: *Al Fikr al Islami: Naqd wa Ijtihad*, Dar al Saqi, 2nd impression, 1992. *Al Fikr al Islami: Qira'ah 'Ilmiyyah*, Al Markaz al Thaqafi al 'Arabi, Beirut, 2nd impression, 1996.
 - 6 Fahmi Jad'an: *Usus al Taqaddum 'inda Mufakkiri'l Islam fi'l 'Alami'l 'Arabi'l Hadith*, 1st impression, Beirut, Al Mu'assasah al 'Arabiyyah li'l Dirasat wa'l Nashr, undated.
 - 7 Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman: *Azmat al 'Aql al Muslim*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 3rd impression, 1413/1993.
 - 8 Taha Jabir al Alwani: *Usul al Fiqh al Islami: Manhaj Bahth wa Ma'rifah*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2nd impression, 1415/1995.
 - 9 Abu'l Qasim Hajj Hamad: *Al 'Alamiyyah al Islamiyyah al Thaniyah – Jadaliyyat al Ghaib wa'l Insan wa'l Tabi'ah*, Dar Ibn Hazm li'l Nashr, Beirut, 2nd impression, 1996.
 - 10 Salah al Din al Jawrashi: *Al Islamiyyun al Taqaddumiyyun*, Markaz al Qahirah li Dirasat Huquqi'l Insan, 2001. Several authors: *Al Muqaddimat al Nadhariyyah li'l Islamiyyin al Taqaddumiyyin: Limadha al Islam? Kaifa Nafhamuh?* Dar al Buraq, Tunis, 1989. Mukhtar al Fajari: *Al Khitab al Dini'l Mu'asir fi Tunis wa Ishkaliyyat al Mashru' al Hadhari*, Majallat 15/21, Kulliyat al Aadaab, Manubah, Tunis, 1991.
 - 11 Yahya Mohammed: *Jadaliyyat al Khitab wa'l Waqi'*, Mu'assasat al Intishar al 'Arabi, Beirut, 1st impression, 2002.



those contemporary issues which owed a debt to it, dating from before Mohammed Iqbal. In doing so, they maintained that it was vital to re-examine current ideas on religious issues and produce a non-ideological interpretation of the thesis: “Islam is suitable for every time and place”. This meant developing new knowledge systems – a goal that that could not be achieved without a radically new and different vision of the world.

The distinctive thing about this new modernist approach was the fact that it endorsed Iqbal’s ideas at three levels: principles, concepts and core issue. The principles were as follows:

- Abandoning the idea of the death of classical culture by returning to it - not as a means of reviving the past in the form that it used to be, but as an agent for progress and for embracing the new global awareness.
- Abandoning the idea that the destiny of a society is dependent upon a social and political system with its own distinct historical features, because this indicates a diagnosis that our critical situation only exists in the public arena and not in people’s minds and knowledge structures.
- Rejecting “historical inevitabilities” - firstly by focusing on an awareness of history and secondly by giving priority to individuals from the point of view of their intellectual, educational and spiritual values, all of which will enable them to realise their potential within their communities.

With regard to concepts, the renewalist “formation stage” ushered in a complete reappraisal of the concepts which formed the basis of its thinking. This was in line with Iqbal, who believed the modern era demanded a new approach to issues such as religion, prophecy, Shariah, the self and man.

The core issue of the renewalist ideology is “contemporaneity”, or “living in the modern world”. Iqbal discusses it in the last chapter of his book - “Is religion possible?”

What he is referring to here is the ability of Muslims to attain a level of knowledge that will allow them to produce an original intellectual structure



and theology capable of interacting with modern knowledge and thinking, yet without severing its roots with its own cultural identity.

Renewal or the “modern self”

When we compare what the renewalists have written over the past quarter century with the writings of the previous century we can understand the extent of the transformation Islamic discourse has undergone in its methodology and its approach to intellectual issues¹.

The most significant development in renewalism’s formation stage in its efforts to join the world of today is the fact that – whatever approach is recommended for modernising religious discourse – a decisive moment has been reached with regard to the question of the heritage, which was a subject for extensive debate for several decades during the twentieth century.

The heritage has ceased to be seen as a relic of the past or a means of defending the nation’s identity. Today it is recognised as an essential element in the study of ideologies and cultures and a vital source for understanding the modern world.

Maintaining links with the past is no longer seen as a burdensome relic of former times and an obstacle to progress, but as a means for enabling Muslims to develop their ideas, keep in touch with their history and grasp what is really happening in contemporary societies.

This “conceptual revolution” would never have happened had it not been for two factors:

- A recognition that there is no contradiction between the hypotheses of an immortal religion and renewal, just as there is no contradiction between religion as revelation and Islamic thought, which is an interaction between the Muslim intellect and the dynamism and true goals of revelation.

¹ For example see Taha Abdul Rahman: *Al ‘Amal al Dini wa Tajdid al ‘Aql*, Al Markaz al Thaqafi'l ‘Arabi, 2nd impression, 1997. See Anwar Abu Taha and various authors: *Khitab al Tajdid al Islami*, Dar al Fikr, Damascus, 2004.



- A recognition of the need to look beyond the idea of a clash between East and West or between Islam and materialism, because it is clear that the things East and West share in common are greater and more numerous than the things that divide them. Moreover, the confrontation that we see taking place is fed by deep divisions within both the Muslim and Western worlds.

With the rise of this new awareness of the modern world, intellectuals and political thinkers have managed to retrieve their vital roles as the makers and shapers of history.

The experiences of modern Arab states, their political problems and their inability to devise alternative strategies have highlighted the importance of the cultural factor in the political and social spheres. A politician finds himself being gradually transformed into an administrator and coming increasingly under the control of the technocratic elites who are incapable of creative thought, because they have been trained under a tunnel-visioned intellectual system that believes in “historical inevitabilities”.

When the intellectuals in modern Arab societies ceased to be free spirits, the politicians – whether in power or in opposition – were unable to develop alternative ways of looking at reality or receive constructive suggestions on how to solve problems so that they could choose the ones they considered most appropriate.

So one of the most important aspects of “contemporaneity-oriented” renewal is the rehabilitation of the status of the intellectual, not because only because he is better informed and has a better trained mind, but also because of the practical role he has to play in his culture and society.

Reinforcing the link between renewal and culture will produce a new kind of politician, because it revives the practices that bring society face to face with its history.

The obstacles that are placed in the way of today’s Arab politician have turned him into a mere administrator and regulator who cannot see the connection between his own situation and the marginalisation and suppression of the intellectual class; this has led to cultural alienation.



Renewal can give culture the recognition that is due to it, in which it will be seen to encompass every area of life and type of behaviour; at the same time this revitalised culture will develop and flourish as it assumes its role of helping to improve society and devise ways in which it can tackle its problems. The second generation of renewalists have recognised that the failure by Arab societies to embrace the modern world has undermined those elements of their culture which can protect them from what is commonly called “cultural invasion” – an “invasion” which is due to nothing other than its own cultural failings.

Renewal can also empower politicians in the Arab world. At present they have virtually no authority and are becoming increasingly distanced from the true role they are expected to play in the realm of politics.

Whatever form or approach it may take, we can perhaps define renewal in its formation stage as a cultural reinvigoration in which the Muslims become aware of the age in which they live and are willing and able to contribute constructively to it.

Renewal means the end of Arab thought’s “ahistorical era” and the birth of an age in which the Arabs and Muslims defend and promote their causes, beliefs and ideas within a rational, human-friendly system of values. The outcome of this will be an end to global religious/ethical divisions.

In this sense the concept of renewal can be seen to be quite distinct from reform, *ijtihad* (interpretative judgement) and modernisation. It is more complex than reform, which means adopting those positive aspects of other cultures and societies that can help improve political and social institutions. It is broader than *ijtihad*, which only looks to the Shariah for solutions to present-day problems and seeks to combine the best of the old with the best of the new. At the same time, it is more deep-rooted than modernisation, which merely imports and assimilates from other cultures.

Renewal is a different, down-to-earth vision of culture and identity with the following characteristics:

- Internal-institutional: empowering and liberating the Arab social elites and promoting harmony so that they can avoid subjection and division.



- Human-intellectual: creating an alternative awareness that establishes a dialectical relationship between isolationism and globalisation and between the ego and the “other”. It endows local culture with creativity and enables it to integrate into global culture in a pluralistic sense that will enhance the human aspects of world culture and civilization.

Like the elephant

What we have been saying about renewal in Islamic thought from its early days to the formation stage has thrown the spotlight onto several elements, of which one of the most significant is culture. As we conclude this paper, we should like to take another look at culture, but specifically from the angle of the “worldview”. In this respect, the question we should like to ask is: “Has there been any change in the second generation of Islamic renewalists’ view of the world?” That is to say, how does this generation see its co-inhabitants on this earth, and how does its view of the universe, society and man help to provide the answers to mankind’s concerns and ideological and existential questions?

We would not be exaggerating if we said that this angle – that of the “worldview” – represents the toughest test that the concept of renewal has to undergo at this formative stage. This is because, even as far as the second generation of renewalists are concerned, Islamic thought has not looked beyond the confines of the Islamic Nation and its needs. Renewal has remained a strictly Muslim concern in this new world of ours and it has not engaged with mankind as a whole and its crises. In other words, it still sees the world as being divided into three regions – *Dar al Islam* (the House/Realm of Islam), *Dar al Harb* (the House/Realm of War) and *Dar al Sulh* (the House/Realm of Truce).

This is a tough test for renewal and the renewalists because the societies of today are engaged in what has become know as a clash of cultures or –depending on the situation or your point of view – cultural dialogue. Socio-cultural and symbolic factors have become crucial in determining the course of history; the superstructure is no longer of secondary interest or dependent upon the infrastructure, but an



important element in its own right as well as relatively independent and sometimes crucial.

Globalisation has presented human societies with a challenge but it has not helped them to find any answers – a situation we can sum up in the question: “How can we live together with others”¹? If this is the issue of the age, and if its focal point is the “worldview”, then this means a re-examination of cultural, religious, ideological and political pluralism has become unavoidable both within our societies and in the wider global context.

Therefore the “renewal discourse” needs to ask whether the “world in three regions hypothesis” – with its connotations of force and conquest as the basis of a relationship with one’s opponents – can still be regarded as an appropriate model for the modern age.

How should religious renewal respond to this challenge?

Is the above hypothesis a distinctive feature of an “original culture” – of the kind that every culture has an unassailable right to retain, even if its region and the world are undergoing radical change?

If we live in the modern world, we need to understand that world and be in tune with it. Some leading Muslim intellectuals have examined this issue with varying degrees of interest or concern. One of the most distinguished of these – the European Muslim Tariq Ramadan – has studied the subject in detail in his book *Dar al Shahadah*², which was published in French in 2004. On the question of being in tune with the modern world, the author asks: “How can a person remain faithful to the message of Islam in the present age? As well as what is obligatory for every Muslim in his personal life, what is required of a society that defines itself as ‘Islamic’?”

He goes on to say: “Should Muslims who live in the West regard themselves as being in *Dar al Harb* and surrounded by enemies?” The subsequent chapters provide the answer and suggest a new category which

¹ See: Alain Touraine: *Pourrons-nous Vivre Ensemble? Egaux at Differents*. Ed. Fayard, Paris, 1997.

² See: Tariq Ramadan: *Dar Ash Shahada*, Ed. Dar alTawhid, Paris 2004.



Tariq Ramadan calls *Dar al Shahadah* (the House/Realm of Testimony [to the Islamic Message]). This *Dar* marks out a new space in which Muslims who are citizens of non-Muslim countries bear testimony to those around them and highlight their values and cultural identity.

Dar al Shahadah offers a non-traditional vision in which Muslims are put to the test to determine whether they are genuinely prepared to play an active part in a world in which they do not form a majority and do not seek to impose their views upon others.

An initiative of this kind sees renewal as a twofold transformation – a transformation within the self and a transformation in understanding others. The result is that religion becomes a force for harmony and reconciliation rather than a cause of conflict and mutual rejection.

In 2004 – the year in which *Dar al Shahadah* was published – a book came out in the United States. *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* by James Sire¹ takes the elephant – the largest land animal – as his symbol for diagnosing the state of the world today and the need for a vision that will enable us to understand our world and solve its problems.

This world/elephant is suffering from the mind-boggling progress that has taken place in its knowledge and information, while at the same time it lacks the vision to synthesise all its discoveries and sciences into a composite whole with a regulatory spiritual dimension.

James Sire describes this same problem in *The Universe Next Door: a Basic Worldview Catalog* – a book that he wrote three decades ago. Various other writers in the West have also been tackling this subject since the middle of the last century when they began demanding an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge as the only way to avoid the Tower of Babel Syndrome – a situation in which people are unable to communicate with each other because they all speak different languages².

¹ See: James W. Sire: *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, Inter Varsity Press, June 2004.

² Basarab Nicolescu: *La Transdisciplinarite – Manifeste*, Editions du Rocher – Collection “Transdisciplinarite” – Paris – 1999.



When it is applied to religious discourse, renewal makes a rediscovery of the self possible on the basis of a new global consciousness founded upon knowledge, not ideology. This represents a qualitative change in Arab culture and the intellectual and social structures of Arab societies. Renewal with the aim of becoming integrated into the modern world does not merely involve accumulating a large volume of innovations so that they can be grafted onto an old society. Rather, it means an end to cultural alienation by bringing man into the mainstream of history and life and restoring his relationship with his global environment. That is the challenge that will have to be faced by a third generation of renewalists – a generation that will enable Islamic thought to extend beyond the borders of the Islamic Nation to the wider world and mankind as a whole.