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Crisis of compatibility: Islam and the 21st century modernity

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After fourteen centuries, if we still speak of Islam today, or place it under the microscope of critique, or even consider it sacred, it is because Islam still has followers and is being practiced. But are Muslims capable of fully implementing the commandments of the Quran and the Prophetic jurisprudence? Or are some commandments merely matters of belief while others are practicable? Can a person refrain from implementing certain divine commands and still be considered a Muslim?

Dear readers, it is essential to note that this question has a philosophical and epistemological dimension. That is, is it possible to practice all beliefs? Or can an individual hold belief in their mind where some remain as abstract subjective while others are acted upon objectively? In epistemology, there is a significant gap between holding a belief and acting upon it. For example, a person might believe that lying is wrong but still choose to lie. However, what about religious beliefs? Can a Muslim believe that all the commandments of the Quran are entirely correct but still not act on some of them? For instance, Muslims believe the Quran is from Allah and that its commandments must be fully implemented. Are they willing to enforce the rule of four witnesses mentioned in Surah An-Nisa? If the answer is no, that they cannot fully implement divine laws, how have Muslims come to the conclusion that commandment of Allah is inapplicable in their lives, whether one or several?

In our current 21st century world, rapid social changes, global ethics, the influence of global culture, and the transformation of the world into a "global village" have rendered many Islamic commandments incompatible with the modern way of life. For example, issues like women's rights, individual freedoms, human rights, child marriage, healthy upbringing, and ethics are all challenges that obstruct a person from remaining Muslim while also being considered modern. This is precisely the central topic of this article. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Muslims have divided into several groups to address this issue and to demonstrate that Islam is compatible with modern societies. As usual, each group considers itself to be on the right path and declares the others misguided. Let us delve into these groups and their perspectives on Islam. At present, Muslims can generally be divided into three main groups: traditionalists, modernists, and fundamentalists. As you will read below, these divisions reveal the instability within Islamic commandments and how and why Islamic law is irreconcilable with modern societies and humanistic rights and values.

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1. Fundamentalist Muslims:

This group of Muslims, who identify as fundamentalists, emphasizes on the literal interpretation of the Quranic verse and considers Sharia and jurisprudence immutable. For instance, everything from growing a beard to dressing, eating, and sleeping must align with the practices of Muhammad. Fundamentalist Muslims believe that human intellect has no value and is unnecessary for faith and adherence to religious principles. Fundamentalists seek to establish societies and eventually governments where Sharia law is fully implemented, aiming to achieve this through the establishment of Islamic governance. From their perspective, religion fulfills all material, spiritual, worldly, and otherworldly needs of humanity, and the establishment of an Islamic state will create a utopian earthly paradise. Fundamentalists strongly oppose Western culture and civilization, viewing it as the result of a deviation from spirituality and human nature. They perceive Islam's enemies as external (the West and outsiders) and reject the separation of religion and politics. According to them, secular governments distance people from Sharia and jurisprudence, which is why they believe such governments should be overthrown.

2. Traditionalist Muslims:

Traditionalist Muslims emphasize the strict adherence to Sharia and jurisprudence in practice and consider reasoning and intellect as tools merely to justify their sacred texts. In their view, intellect is subservient to religious texts and divine will, with no purpose beyond this. Followers of this perspective believe that faith is primarily about practicing Sharia and regard its commandments as unchangeable. They focus on the outward aspects of religion and show no concern for creating a society with ethics that go beyond Sharia rulings. In their view, religion does not promise a utopian earthly paradise, and the world is nothing more than "filth to be avoided." This perspective does not favor secular governments and rejects the separation of religion and politics.

3. Modernist Muslims:

Modernist Muslims accept reasoning and intellect as sources alongside the Quran and Sunnah and strive to use reasoning to validate the authenticity of these texts. Modernists attempt to rationalize religion and present it as logical. In cases where there is a conflict between Quranic verses and intellectual findings, they resort to interpretation and offer alternative understandings of religious texts, often appearing perplexed themselves while leaving others confused. This perspective does not consider Sharia as the ultimate goal but rather as a means to attain spirituality and ethical living. For modernists, faith is more about ethical living and adhering to human principles such as tolerance, leniency, and fairness—values unfortunately absent in many Quranic commandments. They regard Sharia commandments as changeable and consider many of them to be rooted in the social and cultural conditions of fourteen centuries ago. In

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this interpretation of Islam, the separation of religion and politics is accepted, and secular governments are not seen as obstacles to realizing moral religious values.

Conclusion:

Islam faces a significant challenge in adapting to the social and cultural transformations of the modern world. While fundamentalists and traditionalists insist on the full preservation of Sharia, modernists attempt to build a bridge between religion and modern values through reinterpretation and adaptation. These differing viewpoints not only highlight the instability of Islamic beliefs and commandments but also demonstrate that most Islamic laws are no longer compatible with the lives of 21st-century humans. This raises an essential question for Muslims: Can religion coexist with global changes, or does it require a fundamental re-evaluation and re-definition? If so, what concepts need reformation—God, revelation, the Prophet, the Quran, commandments, or jurisprudence?