

FROM GOD TO HUMANITY: Reconstruction of Islamic Theology in Contemporary Era

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Abstract: This article accentuates the need for a paradigm shift in Islamic theology from theocentric to anthropocentric themes. Despite its historical significance, contemporary Islamic theology meets stagnation and a disconnect from pressing human issues. Scholars advocate for a contextualized theology that actively engages with societal problems. The authors echo this call, asserting that a praxis-oriented approach is crucial for Islamic theology's relevance. The article also argues that theocentric doctrines, while significant in their time, are inadequate for

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addressing contemporary challenges. Religion-ethical themes such as *tawhid* (oneness of God), social justice, and liberation spirituality are proposed for reconstruction to align with modern human thought and address universal problems. The hermeneutical circle is a dynamic process involving cultivating reality, dialogue with sacred texts, and continuous interpretation. This study aims to bridge the gap between traditional texts and the present context, allowing for a meaningful reconstruction of Islamic theology. By shifting the paradigm from theocentrism to anthropocentrism, the authors envision a theology that defends God and protects and empowers humanity. The proposed methodological approach also facilitated a paradigm shift, so that Islamic theology remains a dynamic and relevant force in the modern world.

Keywords: Islamic theology, *'Ilm Kalam*, Hermeneutics, Transformation, Humanity, Paradigm Shift.

1. Introduction

Islamic theology has been instrumental in shaping the intellectual contours of Islamic civilization, particularly since its nascent stages in the Arabian Peninsula. Concurrently emerging with other scholarly disciplines like Jurisprudence, Mysticism, and Qur'anic interpretation. Historically, Islamic Theology emerged due to the interaction of Muslims with other religious communities, especially with the Greek civilization, which has a strong tradition of philosophy. The interaction among civilizations demands Muslims to explain their doctrines rationally so people of other religions and civilizations can accept that. At this point, Islamic scholars used logical arguments borrowed from the Greek tradition to explain their doctrines. From here, a new scientific field emerged among Muslims, namely *'Ilm Kalam* (Al-Shafe'i and Abdullah; Ulum; Syakhrani and Majid; Fauzan and Fata).

In general, the main themes discussed in *'Ilm Kalam* delve into the foundational tenets of the Islamic creed (*aqidah*), encompassing pivotal doctrines such as the oneness of God (*tawhid*), eschatological beliefs concerning the resurrection,

divine attributes, and actions, the concepts of sin and recompense, as well as the institution of prophethood. These themes render *'Ilm Kalam* a crucial scientific field within Islam (Al-Shafe'i and Abdullah; M. Amin Abdullah; Bakar and El-Jamai). Throughout the continuum of its development, from its inception to contemporary discourse, Islamic scholars have persistently engaged with and expounded upon these enduring theological subjects within the framework of *'Ilm Kalam*.

The study of contemporary Islamic Theology remains the same. Meanwhile, in this era, Muslims experience a vastly different environment compared to the ancient times when *'Ilm Kalam* emerged. The challenges confronting Muslims today are distinct from those encountered in the early stages of the development of Islamic Theology (Muhammad Amin Abdullah; Syafii). *'Ilm Kalam* was also in stagnation and deemed irrelevant to current matters, whereas today, Muslims and humanity, in general, face severe issues due to modernization. The issues of poverty, ignorance, war, and environmental crisis that currently haunt humanity seem conspicuously absent from the discourse among *'Ilm Kalam* scholars. As a result, many people are increasingly skeptical about the significance and pertinence of religion in the present-day context (Fata and Noorhayati; M. Amin Abdullah).

This situation necessitates proactive measures to transition the focus of Islamic Theology studies from a predominantly theocentric orientation to a more pragmatic and contextually relevant framework. This effort is vital so that Islamic theology continues to develop along with the changing times, and religion (especially Islam) can remain relevant to contemporary life because it can contribute to solving current human problems. At this point, the present article offers a modest contribution toward reshaping the thematic trajectory of *'Ilm Kalam* studies.

2. Literature Review

The discourse surrounding contemporary Islamic theology predominantly revisits historical debates, notably between groups like the rationalists (Mu'tazilites) and the Asharites. Instead of discussing contemporary themes, Nedžad Grabus

emphasized the importance of discussing classical Islamic theology for the current generation of Muslims (Grabus).

Gurbet Sayilgan's study also "turns" to the past, where he tries to scrutinize the theme of migration in the contemporary era by linking it to the doctrine of Adam and Eve's "fall" from heaven to earth. Sayilgan's study is undoubtedly attractive, but it needs to provide solutions to problems that arise today. This study delivers a theological justification for the problem of migration in the contemporary era (Sayilgan). Laura Hassan examines Safaruk Chowdhury's thoughts on "evil" and "suffering" in Islamic theology by referring to Qur'anic texts (Hassan).

Nazila Isgandarova advocates for contextualizing Islamic theology to address present-day challenges more effectively. He contends that integrating Islamic theology with everyday issues is essential, enabling this discipline to provide solutions to the challenges confronting the community. "It is a new epistemic task for Islamic theologians to produce more practical theological knowledge," he said. However, Isgandarova's invitation is only in the form of an "initial call" about the significance of locomoting the study of Islamic theology from the "sky" to practical problems (Isgandarova). Regrettably, Islamic theologians and scholars have not responded favorably to this appeal.

Our study originates from the same anxiety as Isgandarova above. Islamic theology studies at Islamic campuses persistently revolve around conventional themes, emphasizing the concept of "God." The discussion in Islamic theological discourse predominantly centers on God, with humans playing a secondary role and being marginalized. Therefore, Islamic theology requires assistance in addressing the challenges facing humanity. Hence, our research represents a constructive answer to Nazila Isgandarova's invitation.

3. Reviewing the Concept of Islamic Theology

Islamic theology is often referred to as '*Ilm Kalam*'. It encompasses the systematic study and rationalization of Islamic beliefs and doctrines. While the term is similar to the English word "theology," it signifies a distinct discipline within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Islamic theology delves into the exploration

and understanding of theological concepts and principles within the context of Islam, contributing to the broader discourse on faith and belief in the Islamic worldview.

Indeed, scholars have employed various names to designate '*Ilm Kalam*, reflecting the diverse perspectives and approaches within the field of Islamic theology. Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150 H/767 M) referred to it as '*Ilm Fiqh al-Akbar*; (Mustofa Abdurraziq 265); Imām al-Shafī'ī (d. 204 H/819 AD), Imām Malīk (d. 179 H/795 AD), and Imām Ja'far al-Ṣadiq (d. 148 H/765 AD) termed it '*Ilm Kalām*, with *Mutakallimūn* as its figure; Imām al-Ash'arī (d. 324 H/935 AD), al-Baghdādī (d. 429 H/1037 AD), and other scholars from al-Azhar University utilized the expression '*Ilm Uṣūl al-Dīn*; al-Ṭahāwī (d. 331 H/942 AD), al-Ḡazalī (d. 505 H/1111 AD), al-Ṭūsī (d. 671 H/1272 AD), and al-Ijī (d. 756H/1355 AD) referred to it as '*Ilm al-Aqa'id*; Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415 H/1024 AD) named it '*Ilm al-Naḍar wa al-Istidlāl*; al-Taftāzānī labeled it '*Ilm al-Tawhīd* (Haleem in Nasr et al, 1996, 74-75); Harry Austyn Wolfson used the expression '*The Philosophy of Kalam*; Ahmad Mahmud Shubhy called it '*Ilmi Kalam*; M. Abdel Haleem described it as *Speculative Theology*; (Haleem 74-75; Washil and Fata); CA Qadir viewed it as *Dialectical Theology* (Qadir 112) and Harun Nasution coined the term *Islamic Theology* (Nasution 12).

Some scholars characterize "*Ilm Kalam* as a discourse or rational inquiry concerning God. According to Reese, theology is essentially a discipline grounded in revealed truth, independent of philosophy and science (Reese 28). Similarly, Ibn Khaldun asserts that *Kalam*, is a science equipped with logical evidence to defend the faith and repudiate deviant reformations of the initial and orthodox Muslim dogma (Khaldun 201). Therefore, '*Ilm Kalam*, specifically *tawhīd*, entails a theoretical exploration of a belief system, a creed, and the structural foundation of the Muslim faith based on both reason and revelation. The ultimate objective of *tawhīd* is to provide a justification for the Islamic creed and to fortify belief with faith. Consequently, *tawhīd* holds a pivotal position in the framework of Muslim diversity, encompassing fundamental teachings and, in the terminology of Hanafi, scrutinizing the noblest, Allah (Hanafi 41).

In the logical framework of the new paradigm designed to address contemporary needs and challenges, theology should not be confined to the conventional understanding of classical discourse, which predominantly leans toward theocentrism—rooted in the *theos* and *logos* etymologically. Rather, theology should be grasped as the tangible 'ilm al-kalām, the science of words. Within this framework, God is encapsulated in the term 'logos' because God is not bound by any form of knowledge (Hanafi 48). Approaching theology as the science of words implies an exploration of conversation analysis, encompassing both verbal expression and the contextual elements shaped by faith. In this perspective, theology, akin to anthropology, emerges as a discipline delving into the purpose and analysis of words and conversations, establishing itself as a human science rather than a study centered on Gods. From a philosophical standpoint, a theology that shifts its *locus theologicus* asserts, within a hermeneutic framework, that theology is not merely a sacred discourse; rather, it evolves into a systematically organized human science, and thus, becomes profane. In practical terms, theology manifests itself in various ethical, social, economic, and political conflicts, where each social group within a theological faith pursues its interests and defends them within the context of its belief system (Umam; Fauzan and Fata).

The reinterpretation of theology as the actual 'Ilm al-Kalām provides a logical rationale for shifting its *locus theologicus* from a focus on "faith crisis" to "human crisis." This paradigmatic transformation marks theology's rebirth as an anthropocentric, more pragmatic, and socially transformative discipline. The shift in *locus* stems from the premise that the *al-Qur'ān* scripture embodies God's incarnation. Consequently, through the *al-Qur'ān*, God narrates stories about God's essence, with humans and humanity as the central subjects of the narrative. Simultaneously, God designates humans as the objects of the story, to whom God imparts God's narrative. The supreme concept of God's entire story, or God's religion, Islam, revolves around God's idea of humanity. Normatively, the theological underpinning of this redefinition is firmly rooted in humanity, evident both in the *al-Qur'ān* and the praxis of Muhammad

(PBUH), known as *al-Sunnah*, which constitutes the central theme of Islamic teachings as a whole (Umam 86).

Hence, the necessity for locus-shifting arises from the classical Islamic theology paradigm centered around *theos*. The current *locus* is comparatively microscopic as it gives precedence to individual perspectives. While humanity, in its macro context, is intricately linked to communal systems and structures in practice, this corresponds with the fundamental motive of the theological paradigm, with *Anthropos* being its *locus* in a social *praxis* order aimed at transforming the world or society. Consequently, this study anticipates a paradigm shift, as articulated by M. Amin Abdullah (125).

Consequently, there is a compelling need to reconstruct classical Islamic theology. The defense of classical Islamic theology, which predominantly follows a theocentric trend as its prime focus, deviates from its primary and essential mission: the liberation and emancipation of humans. The conventional theological discourse adheres to a formula that has become a mere dry religious discussion, disconnected from tangible human realities. The paradigm inherited from its predecessors represents nothing more than teachings from the heavens – pure theoretical discourse, abstract, speculative, elitist, and unchanging. It needs to address the actual needs of humanity and the realities of our society. In contrast, the original spirit and fundamental mission of Islamic theology, exemplified in the concept of *Tawhid* during the Prophet's era, were inherently liberating, progressive, emancipatory, and revolutionary (Hanafi 87).

Moreover, there is a pressing need to formulate contemporary Islamic theology as a synthesis of modern human thought arising from the societal transformations propelled by science and technology. In light of the perspectives emerging from both modern and postmodern societies, Islam is called upon to present fundamental solutions to pressing human issues such as poverty, injustice, human rights, and the vulnerabilities of women. Consequently, the discourse of contemporary Islamic theology becomes a matter of universal concern, encompassing issues of religious pluralism, structural poverty, and environmental degradation.

4. The Urgency of Paradigm Shifting in Islamic Theology

The discourse within classical Islamic theology predominantly revolves around a theocentric paradigm, emphasizing God and divine principles as its central tenets. In this context, theology serves primarily as the foundational structure to "defend" God rather than address the concerns of humanity. While this theocentric perspective was crucial during the mid-*Hijri* age when the Islamic formation was in progress, the present era, characterized by advancements in science and technology, calls for a reevaluation and reconstruction of Islamic theology. The referred shifting is from a theology that defends God (theocentric) to a theology that protects humanity (anthropocentric) which serves as a framework to comprehend the positive changes happening in the human society (Hanafi 117).

Fazlur Rahman contended that theology, or the practice of theology, should focus on cultivating moral and ethical values to guide humans in embracing moral responsibility, termed as *taqwa* in *al-Qur'ān* (Rahman 54). Islamic theology, likewise, represents an intellectual endeavor to convey a coherent and faithful interpretation of the contents of *al-Qur'ān*. Consequently, theology serves as a functional religious tool with practical applications. This functionality is evident in its capacity to provide intellectual and spiritual tranquility for individuals and is disseminated to the broader community (Ramos 209). From both modern and postmodern perspectives, Islam is called upon to offer fundamental solutions to humanity's inherent problems, including poverty, injustice, environmental and gender issues. Thus, a functional theology directly addresses these challenges and guides resolving empirical problems faced by humanity (Rais 69; Arifin).

Amin Abdullah posited that the challenges faced by *'Ilm Kalam* or contemporary Islamic theology extend beyond the confines of religious boundaries, encompassing universal humanity issues such as pluralism, diversity, structuralized poverty, and environmental damage. Traditionally, theology in various religions predominantly focused on God (theocentric), often neglecting to connect its discourse with the broader challenges faced by humanity (anthropocentric). Abdullah argues that

adhering to this theological formula is becoming increasingly outdated. Moreover, he highlights that *al-Qur'ān* has already delved into discussions addressing universal humanity in a significant portion of its discourses, indicating the potential for Islamic theology to align more closely with the diverse and pressing issues facing humanity (M. Amin Abdullah 139). This recognition underscores the need for a more inclusive and responsible approach in contemporary Islamic theology. Indeed, it is imperative for Islamic theologians to actively engage in discussions about contemporary realities and embrace the evolving thoughts in the present age. This entails a necessary departure from a preoccupation with the past, particularly a distant historical era. In order to remain relevant and impactful, contemporary Islamic theology must align itself with the trajectory of modern human thoughts, which has been profoundly shaped by the advancements in science and technology.

There are three crucial areas that require improvement in the discourse of classical Islamic theology. Firstly, there is a need to reconsider discussions related to humans, nature, and history. Traditional *Kalam* discussions often focused on abstract deliberations concerning God's existence, various divine attributes, the existence of angels, eschatological concepts, prophecy, and other theoretical arguments that appeared disconnected from real-world realities. Additionally, the classical *Kalam* discourse lacked a harmonious relationship with the actual experiences of humanity, raising the potential for distortion of Islamic history and teachings, given theology's profound and intrinsic relationship with anthropology. Secondly, the existence of traditional Islamic theology in its speculative, theoretical, elitist, and static paradigm has resulted in a loss of social impetus and momentum of resistance. Classical theological articles have predominantly delved into reflections on pure faith, describing faith without sufficient relevance to real human life. This style of discussion is deemed hazardous and devoid of meaning. Thirdly, it is imperative for the classical Islamic theology paradigm to undergo renewal, reconstruction, and reformulation into a new and progressive model. The existing paradigm has become

outdated and is no longer aligned with the demands of modernity, historical movements, and the ever-changing era. Reforms are necessary to ensure that Islamic theology remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of contemporary society.

Starting from the identified weaknesses of 'Ilm Kalam, the deconstruction of this science becomes a necessity. In this context, deconstruction goes beyond merely dismantling an existing construction. Instead, it involves efforts to accompany the change by reconstructing it based on the latest demands of society. The objective of deconstruction is to "demythologize" existing concepts or views that have become "sacred texts" and scientific myths in the Islamic world. To achieve this, it is crucial to engage in a critical examination of foundational concepts within 'Ilm Kalam and prioritize rationality as the cornerstone of knowledge. This entails revisiting Revelation in order to elucidate intricate cultural and historical occurrences more effectively. The aim is to create a more robust and relevant framework that incorporates the contemporary societal needs and challenges while maintaining a respect for rational discourse and a nuanced interpretation of Revelation.

At this juncture, Hasan Hanafi discerned the imperative for a paradigm shift from the traditional model, rooted in the logico-metaphysical paradigm (dialectic of words), to a theology grounded in the "empirical" paradigm (social-political dialectic). In Hanafi's perspective, theology surpasses mere academic study; it involves a profound analysis of *Kalam* or discourse within its contextual framework, signifying a comprehensive understanding of specific subjects, particularly creed (Hanafi 212). This shift underscores the importance of incorporating empirical and socio-political dimensions into theological discourse, aligning it more closely with real-world complexities and the challenges of contemporary society.

Absolutely, theology extends beyond a mere academic pursuit and encompasses anthropology and hermeneutics. Viewed through the lens of hermeneutics, theology becomes a theory of understanding revelation, encompassing the interpretation of each letter at various levels of reality – from logos to practice. The

transformation of Revelation from God's "mind" into human life is a critical aspect of this hermeneutical process. To achieve this, certain elements come into play:

- 1) *Historical Awareness*: This involves determining the authenticity of the text and assessing the degree of certainty associated with it.
- 2) *Eidetic Consciousness*: This aspect explicates the rational meaning of the text, grounding it in reason and logic.
- 3) *Practical Consciousness*: Utilizing the derived meaning as a theoretical basis for action. This aspect brings Revelation into practical guidance for humans to achieve their ultimate goals in life on earth (Ramos 46).

The observed inertia within Islamic teachings may stem from various factors, with one notable aspect being the lack of religious drive. Despite the vitality inherent in Islamic teachings, a deficiency in religious motivation can lead to stagnation. Traditionally, religious motivation acts as a catalyst for change, inspiring individuals to navigate and transcend challenging societal conditions. The scarcity of this religious impetus may cause infrequent and minimal social transformation within the Islamic sphere, as evident in regions like Indonesia.

In light of the viewpoints articulated by contemporary Islamic thinkers, there arises a compelling need for a paradigmatic reorientation within Islamic theology – a transition from the traditional divine-centric concepts such as free will, visions of Allah, divine attributes, intellectual prowess, revelation, ethical dichotomies, the eternal nature of the *Qur'an*, divine justice, and the status of transgressors towards a transformative and liberating theological framework, founded upon the core ideals of Islam's *Shari'ah* – a human revolution. At the core of this reorientation are the principles of liberation, encapsulated by concepts such as *al-'adālah* (justice), *al-musāwamah* (egalitarianism, equality), and *al-hurriyah* (freedom). This shift from traditional to transformative theology necessitate a reconstruction and redefinition of contemporary realities fostering a theology that is not only pertinent but also emancipatory.

There are at least three fundamental issues that have to be discussed in the new era of Islamic theology:

1). *The Notion of Tawhid*

Fundamentally, *Tawhid* is the central doctrine in classical Islamic theology (Al-Faruqi 2). In classical Islamic theological discourse, there exists a dialectic tension between human freedom, encompassing free will and free actions, as emphasized in rational theologies, and the notion of absolute provisions external to humans, particularly God's predestination, as idealized in traditional theologies (Nasution 90). There is a need for a redefined theology that interprets the concept of *Tawhid* with a leaning towards anthropocentrism. According to Hanafi, the idea of *Tawhid* is no longer perceived merely as a teaching about the oneness of God. However, it is understood as:

The unity of the human individual, which is far from dualistic behavior such as hypocrisy and opportunistic behavior. Thoughts, feelings, and words are in line with the action. *Tawhid* also means social unity, for instance a classless society without rich and poor classes. *Tawhid* also has the meaning of unity of humanity without any racial discrimination, without economic differences, without differences between the developing and advanced societies" (Hanafi 234).

Therefore, *Tawhid* must be understood and embraced to signify the unity of the Godhead. Faith in divine unity leads to the next concept, the unity of creation. In a socio-horizontal context, the unity of creation fosters a belief in the principle of the unity of humanity. Theological recognition of the unity of humanity asserts that *Tawhid* rejects all forms of oppression against humanity. In Islam, the unity of humanity necessitates a shared way of life, as outlined in the *Qur'an* and hadith, for believers. Thus, conceptually, *Tawhid* guides a unified purpose in life, converging towards a singular destination, Allah (Rais 87).

2). *The Notion of Social Justice*

Social justice is a topic addressed in classical Islamic theology (Nasution 54). However, in classical Islamic theological discussions, the focus tends to center predominantly on the concept of God's justice (*al-'Adl*). According to Hanafi, the treatment of God's justice in classical Islamic theology tends to be overly defensive of God, with potential consequences of either serving as an ideology of liberation for the oppressed or justifying

colonialism by oppressors. Theology, Hanafi argues, should serve a legitimate function in advocating for the interests of different social layers (Hanafi 217).

As a result, the idea of God's justice (al-'adl) needs to undergo reconstruction and redefinition within the framework of social justice. This redefinition begins with recognizing that social inequity (manifested in poverty, societal degradation, ignorance, exploitation, discrimination, and dehumanization) is a product of a social process influenced by unjust structures and systems throughout human history (Rais 78; M. Amin Abdullah 19). This perspective implies that oppressive social conditions are not predetermined, as traditional theologies often assert, but rather the outcome of a deliberate historical process. Moreover, it challenges the notion that social issues result solely from a flaw in human mentality or culture, as proposed by rational theologies, emphasizing instead the direct impact of unfair, exploitative, and oppressive systems and structures.

3). *The Notion of Liberation Spirituality*

The notion of Liberation Spirituality represents a tangible manifestation of a reflective process delving into the lived reality of Muslims and the fundamental objective of Islam as a religion that liberates them. Liberation, framed within the realm of spirituality, extends beyond confronting oppressive structures; it consistently seeks to emancipate individuals from the dominance of specific discourses, particularly those emanating from certain religious doctrines. For instance, spirituality must be dynamic in contextualizing religious texts within the contemporary milieu, as highlighted by Rais (89) and Al-Faruqi (7). The advocacy for liberation spirituality is explicit in its intent—safeguarding the religious dimension of theological ideas while addressing the enduring nature of their transcendent values. Consequently, it goes beyond the traditional focus on the concept of *al-Amr bi al-Ma'rūf wa al-Nahy' an al-Munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding wrong), incorporating a pronounced emphasis on contextual relevance within the ambit of present-day societal challenges. This extends to various forms of social malaise. In practical terms, implementing this transformative theology necessitates the active participation of the oppressed and the subaltern sections.

Indeed, this theological approach carries the potential to cultivate a more just and uplifting societal landscape for humanity. By adopting such a framework, Islam will propagate a guiding doctrine that prioritizes "transforming the world to transform individuals" over the alternative approach of "altering individuals to influence the world." This paradigm shift also emphasizes the proactive transformation of societal structures and dynamics to positively impact individuals, in harmony with the faith's intrinsic liberating spirit.

5. The Challenge of Modernity and the Methodological Offer

The contemporary era undeniably presents a myriad of challenges that Muslims, whether willingly or not, are compelled to address. This predicament can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, there is the pervasive influence of subjects laying claim to universal character in the modern world. Secondly, the extensive dissemination of modern world culture on a global scale contributes significantly to this dynamic. Thirdly, the financial realm serves as a ubiquitous link between the interactions of nations worldwide, including Islamic countries. Lastly, the technology adopted by Muslims, now integral to their lives, is fundamentally rooted in the assumptions of the modern worldview. These four indicators collectively underscore the inescapable reality that Muslims are confronted with the multifaceted challenges posed by the modern world.

In confronting the imperative of addressing the challenges posed by modernity, a requisite approach involves the reconstruction of fundamental principles. This process is aptly facilitated through a method that finds expression in theological reflection, notably through the hermeneutical circle. Hermeneutics, as a discipline, can be delineated into three categories: method, philosophy, and criticism. The first category delves into hermeneutics as a methodology applicable to the human sciences (*geistesswissenschaften*). The second category focuses on the philosophical dimension, placing emphasis on the ontological status of 'understanding' itself. The third category, criticism, directs attention to the examination of factors leading to distortions in understanding and communication. In this context,

the critical dimension of hermeneutics scrutinizes the root causes of misinterpretations and breakdowns in communication, providing insights into potential pitfalls that may hinder the accurate comprehension of theological reflections (Bleichert 8–12). By employing hermeneutics in these nuanced categories, theologians can navigate the challenges of modernity more effectively, fostering a thoughtful and rigorous engagement with theological principles within the contemporary context.

In essence, hermeneutics constitutes a scientific theory of interpretation designed to elucidate texts by examining their objective characteristics (the grammatical meaning of words and their historical variations) as well as their subjective aspects (the author's intent). In its application, Hermeneutics extends beyond the mere reading of reality; rather, it serves as a catalyst for initiating a comprehensive process aimed at restructuring reality itself. Consequently, it embodies a spirit of liberation, as scholars like Gadamer emphasize (43). The transformative potential of hermeneutics lies in understanding texts and leveraging that understanding as a dynamic force for positive change, reflecting a commitment to a holistic and liberating approach to interpreting and reshaping reality.

The hermeneutic framework for liberation, grounded in Gadamer's insights, is fundamentally ontological. According to Gadamer, the hermeneutical situation serves as the ontological starting point for all human behavior and thoughts. Within this framework, the hermeneutic process involves interpreting a text, not with the sole aim of extracting the original meaning intended by the author, but rather creating a new meaning shaped by the current conditions of the interpreter, that is, the reader. In this interpretive action, the objective is not to reproduce the author's intended meaning mechanically. Instead, it entails the generation of a new and relevant meaning aligned with the present context of the interpreter. Recognizing the impossibility of individuals fully detaching themselves from their historical context or the inherent realities of their existence, there exists an intrinsic challenge in completely reconceptualizing the meanings embedded in a text. Once a text is disseminated, it acquires a degree of autonomy, making the process of reshaping its meaning

intricate. In this context, the hermeneutic idea establishes its epistemological reasoning in a circular hermeneutic motion (Arkoun 65). This circular motion acknowledges the interplay between the interpreter's historical context and the evolving meanings attributed to a text, creating a dynamic and iterative process of interpretation that is inherently linked to the present realities of the interpreter.

The initiation of the hermeneutic process is rooted upon the "fundamental structure" of experience which is always connected to the social analysis employed to interpret reality and the active involvement of the interpreter, particularly those who are marginalized or oppressed (*mustad'afīn*). The circular motion inherent in this first stage underscores the interpreter's necessary engagement with or proximity to the contextual reality. In the words of Freire, it is crucial to avoid a dichotomy where reflection without action leads to mere verbalism, and conversely, action without reflection descends into mere activism (Freire 12). This underscores the imperative for a balanced and iterative interplay between reflective thought and practical engagement in order to foster a more meaningful and transformative understanding of reality.

Moreover, the formulated reality undergoes a confrontation, notably through dialogue, with sacred texts—the *Qur'ān* and *Hadīth*—situated at the structure's apex (superstructure). Simultaneously, this dialogue must transcend the confines of the world of the text, considering the contextual existence of the text itself. This procedure undergoes a process of categorical mapping of texts (*Tafsīr Mawḍū'i*) about the formulated reality, either directly or indirectly. Subsequently, the hermeneutical circular motion persists into the interpretation stage (*Tafsīr Ta'wīl*) of the mapped texts, aligning them with the contemporary context of the formulated reality. The related texts are interpreted in the second stage using a hermeneutical procedure with a regressive-progressive pattern (Arkoun).

The regressive motion within the hermeneutical approach involves a continuous examination of historical contexts, not for the purpose of projecting contemporary needs and demands onto sacred texts, but rather to discern the historical mechanisms and

factors that gave rise to these texts and to provide them with contextual meaning. This process entails studying the circumstances surrounding the appearance of the text, such as the revelation of the Qur'ān, in its social context, with the aim of uniquely understanding its meaning within the context of the past. While the regressive motion is focused on unraveling the historical roots and context of the sacred texts, the understanding process itself unfolds in a contemporary personal and social context—the very context of the formulated reality discussed earlier. This aspect represents a progressive movement within the hermeneutical approach, where the insights derived from historical exploration are applied and interpreted in a way that resonates with the current circumstances and concerns of the interpreter. This suggests that the interpretative cycle remains dynamic, continually evolving and enriching its hermeneutical approach. Consequently, the overarching hermeneutic endeavor encompasses two facets: an objective dimension centered on texts like the *al-Qur'ān* and *hadīth* and a subjective dimension that pertains to the contextual and formulated reality.

6. Conclusion

Islamic theology or *'Ilm Kalam*, boasts a profound historical foundation dating back to its inception. Shaped through interactions with various civilizations, notably the Greek tradition, *'Ilm Kalam* served as a crucial tool in rationalizing Islamic doctrines. However, in the contemporary era, Islamic theology has reached a stagnation point, struggling to effectively tackle present-day human challenges. Our endeavor was to advocate for a transformative shift in Islamic theology, moving from theocentric to anthropocentric reference points. This research aligns with the calls of scholars like Nazila Isgandarova, urging a shift in the study of Islamic theology towards a more practical direction. The shift in Islamic theology discourse is imperative for the survival of Islam in the modern and postmodern world. This transition involves moving from a focus solely on God (theocentric) to addressing universal human problems (anthropocentric). This evolution is crucial in aligning Islamic teachings with the realities and challenges of the

contemporary global landscape. The traditional abstract and speculative themes within Islamic Theology must evolve into practical themes to offer solutions to current issues. We do emphasize the importance of an Islamic theology that not only "defends God" but also safeguards humanity. To this end, we suggest a restructuring, or rather a reconfiguration, of classical theological concepts such as *tawhid*, justice, and liberation spirituality to address all human issues. We presume that this reconfiguration will alone make Islamic theology more adaptable to the demands of modernity and our ever-changing world.

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